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The iconographic evolution of the Day of the Dead: how it is used as place branding in Mexico

Sílvia Alexandra Cabral Macedo

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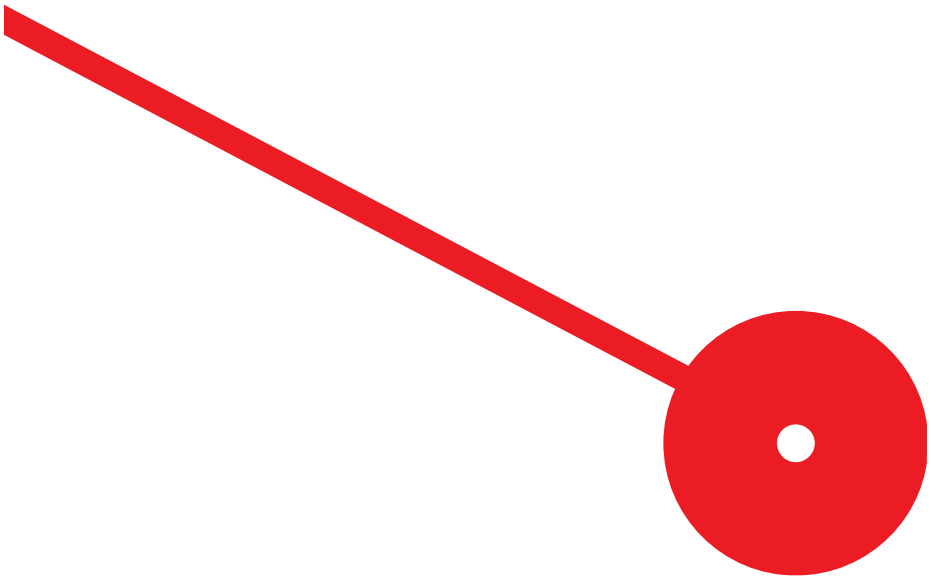
2022/2023



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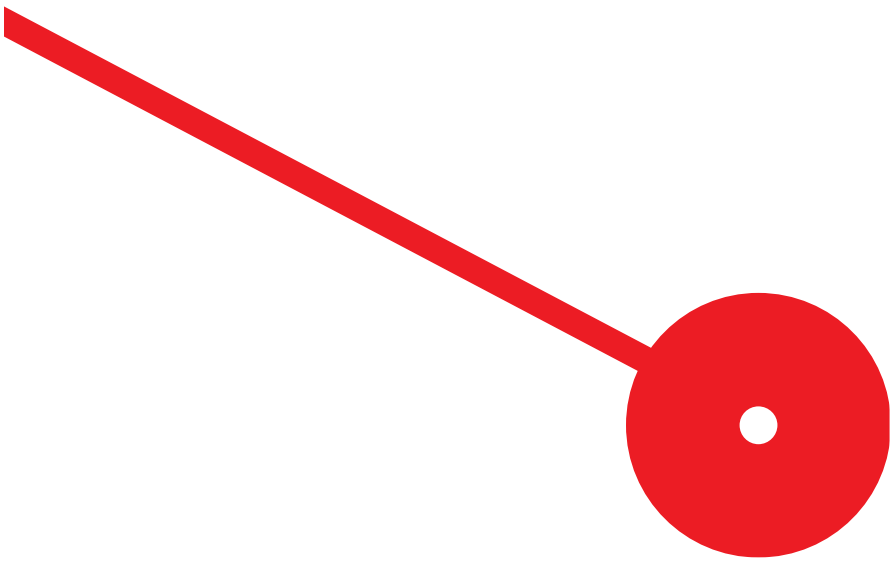
Sílvia Alexandra Cabral Macedo

Dissertação de Mestrado apresentado ao Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Intercultural Studies for Business, sob orientação de Professora Laura Tallone



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Dedication

I want to devote this thesis to my parents, who continually supported me in pursuing my education and aspirations. They were always by my side, especially when I needed emotional support. I could not have undertaken this journey without them.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father who is currently battling cancer. You are an example of your strength, perseverance, and determination.

Thank you for your endless love, support, and encouragement.

Acknowledgments

I would to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my supervisor Professor Laura Tallone, who made this work possible. Her guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my dissertation.

I want also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support and understanding while I was conducting research and composing my dissertation.

Resumo

Esta dissertação insere-se no âmbito do Mestrado em Intercultural Studies for Business do Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto. O tema desta tese é - *The iconographic evolution of the Day of the Dead: how it is used as place branding in Mexico* - e o seu principal objetivo é demonstrar o peso e a importância que o Dia dos Mortos tem para a comunidade local e internacional a nível económico, cultural, social e turístico.

Ao longo deste ensaio, pude demonstrar a origem e as lendas associadas a esta festividade, a forma como este dia é celebrado e a sua preparação, bem como a evolução da sua importância económica, cultural e turística desde a era pré-hispânica até aos dias de hoje. Além disso, comparei o Dia dos Mortos com o Halloween, com o objetivo de demonstrar que são duas festividades diferentes em vários aspetos, apesar de existir um conhecimento geral comum que são semelhantes.

Por fim, devido à sua própria evolução influenciada pelo processo da globalização e da mercantilização, foi possível observar as transformações recentes pela qual esta passou, provocando uma mudança em como esta festa é vivida pelos habitantes locais e por quem visita a cidade do México nesta altura.

É de referir a influência que esta celebração tem noutras culturas e a mudança religioso-cultural que se tem sentido ao longo do tempo.

Palavras-chave: Dia dos Mortos. Indígenas. México. Festividade. Negócio

Abstract

This dissertation is part of the master's programme in Intercultural Studies for Business at the Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto. The theme of this thesis is - The iconographíc evolution of the Day of the Dead: how it is used as place branding in Mexico - and its main objective is to demonstrate the weight and importance that the Day of the Dead has for the local and international community at an economic, cultural, social and tourist level.

Throughout this essay, I was able to demonstrate the origin and legends associated with this festivity, the way this day is celebrated and its preparation, as well as the evolution of its economic, cultural, and tourist importance from the pre-Hispanic era to the present day. In addition, I compared the Day of the Dead with Halloween, with the aim of demonstrating that they are two different festivities in many respects, despite the common knowledge that they are similar.

Finally, due to its evolution influenced by the process of globalisation and commercialisation, it was possible to observe the recent transformations it has undergone, causing a change in how this festival is experienced by locals and those who visit Mexico City at this time.

It is worth mentioning the influence that this celebration has on other cultures and the religious-cultural change that has taken place over time.

Keywords: Day of the Dead. Indigenous. Mexico. Festivity. Business

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Introduction

The Day of the Dead is a traditional celebration of indigenous origin commemorated mainly between October 31st and November 2nd in honour of the deceased. The holiday involves family and friends coming together to pay homage and remember those who have passed away. It is characterised by being a collective festival where death is celebrated. In fact, at this time of year, cemeteries come alive with typical festive decorations and become a place for socialising. Although related to Christian customs, it is less solemn and is portrayed as a holiday of joyful celebration with a humorous tone.

The celebration, as we know it today, arose after a syncretism between pre-Hispanic roots and traditions and modern elements of European Christian traditions - All Saints' Day and the All Soul Day. On the one hand, for Mesoamericans, death does not have the moral connotation of the Catholic religion associated with hell and paradise. On the contrary, they believed that the fate of souls was cyclical, beginning in Mictlán (the place of the dead). Mesoamerica witnessed the celebration of Death, whose ritual celebrates those who die by transcending to another space and time. The cycle has no end, but a continuation in another phase.

However, everything changed with the arrival of the Spanish settlers in the 16th century. As they embraced Christianity, there was a cultural clash with the pagan indigenous rituals, as the evangelists began to introduce Christian elements such as candles, crosses, rosaries, and some images of saints. Over time, the Catholic Church allowed what is known as “idolatrías paliada”, which consists of mixing some indigenous beliefs and cultural elements with Catholic elements, giving us the festivity as we know it today.

It's indisputable that these ceremonies still have a lot of mystical and religious importance. However, looking beyond the religious factor and discussing its importance is necessary. With time, promoted by the evolution of society itself, this festivity has gained a cultural, economic, and tourist relevance that is fundamental to the development of the local community. Mexico and its respective celebrations have become the national symbol of the Day of the Dead and some typical elements have become the festivity's trademark.

Therefore, this essay will discuss how religious tradition has progressively become a Mexican cultural, tourist, and economic brand, focusing mainly on iconographic evolution and how it is used as place branding for Mexico City. In addition, I will analyse the transformations of the holiday at a religious, cultural, economic, and tourist level, looking at its consequences, such as a loss of authenticity. In the first chapters, I aim to describe the festivity and only in the end, I would make a comparison or contrastive analysis between the events.

Firstly, as an introduction to the topic, I'll explain the legend and its origins, as well as the intrinsic relationship between death and Mexicans, to understand the pre-Hispanic roots and the way Mesoamerican people view death. In addition, I'll talk about the indigenous influence on the celebrations, the typical symbols - their origin and purpose - and the way they are celebrated.

Secondly, in more detail, I will describe the iconographic art of the Day of the Dead, including its origins and the Spanish influence, to understand the role of Catholic evangelisers in the Day of the Dead and how they changed the celebratory pattern by including Christian elements in the celebrations.

To understand the iconographic elements that characterise this celebration, I will explain each one individually to understand their origin, meaning, and function and how they have changed, i.e., to observe how and in what context they are used today (for example, the skulls, skeletons, and the figure of La Catrina).

Thirdly, I will discuss the evolution of its economic, cultural, and tourist importance, reflecting and differentiating between pre-Hispanic times, the colonial era, and the Revolution to the present day. In addition, I'll talk about including the Day of the Dead on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, demonstrating how it was a turning point for Mexico.

Finally, I will analyse how the Day of the Dead and its surroundings have become an act of place branding, looking at how globalisation and commercialisation have transformed the cult. Thus, I will explain the economic and social impact and the consequences of globalisation.

The methodology used was bibliographical research by sociologists and anthropologists, such as Stanley Brandes' article “Iconography in Mexico's Day of the Dead: Origins and Meaning”, which takes us through the pre-Hispanic world, colonial times, and 19th-century politics and journalism. Furthermore, the material has been supplemented with data from websites related to the Day of the Dead and the Mexican government.

The reason I chose this theme, despite its density, was to try to observe this celebration as a company trying to sell its product. That is, Mexico is selling and marketing a product, in this case, the Day of the Dead festival, to its own country and the world. So, by making this connection and analogy, I tried to integrate the theme into the scope of the master’s degree.

Chapter I. Day of the Dead: its origins and the joyful representation of the Dead

1. Legend and its origin

For Mesoamericans, death does not have the moral connotation of the Christian religion usually associated with hell and paradise (punishment and reward). Instead, they believed that the fate of souls was determined by the type of death they suffered rather than by their actions while alive**.**

During the ancient period, pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican peoples (Aztecs, Mayans, Purépechas, Nahuats, and Totonacs) succumbed to the cult of death. Death was considered the beginning of a journey to Mictlán (place of the dead), so the deceased's soul would have to go through several obstacles until it reached its destination accompanied by Mictlantecuhtli (lord of the dead). and by Mictecacíhuatl (the lady of the dead). In the end, together with the gods of Mictlán, they would have to make an offering for them to obtain eternal rest and choose the fate of their souls (Sanguino, 2021).

Next, the principal representative civilizations of the Mesoamerican region developed a ritual around the cult of death, which is the antecedent of the current Day of the Dead.

For example, the legend among the Aztecs says that every time someone dies, they travel through various regions of the underworld. In addition, it was believed that life continued after death, so the possibility of four different "destinies" was considered, depending on the way of dying. According to the archaeologist Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, the destinations are the following:

- **The Tonatiuhichan:** a place where warriors killed in battle, pregnant women or those who died during childbirth went. It is a place of eternal joy, where the sun is celebrated with music, singing, and dancing (El Sol de México, 2019).
- **The Tlalocan**: (from Tlaloc, God of rain): all those who died from causes related to water arrived here. It is a place of rest and abundance (El Sol de México, 2019).
- **The Chichihualcuauhco**: it is a space consigned to dead children. Here they were raised by a tree until they were "born again." The children would return to Earth when their race was wiped out. In this way, death would be reborn (El Sol de México, 2019).
- **The Mictlán:** the kingdom of the dead and the destination. This place was inhabited by the gods Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacíhuatl (El Sol de México, 2019).

The celebration was commemorated in the ninth month of the Aztec solar calendar, around the beginning of August, and lasted for a whole month. In preparation for death and rebirth ceremonies, the skulls were kept as trophies and displayed in temples during these rituals (López, 2020).

However, everything changed with the arrival of the Spanish colonists in the 16th century. By being Christians there was a cultural shock regarding the indigenous pagan ritual. In a way closer to the customs of the Catholic celebrations, the celebration of the Day of the Dead went from August to November, giving rise to the famous festivals that we know today. In addition, religious elements were included such as candles, crosses, rosaries, and images of saints (*La Festividad Indígena Dedicada a Los Muertos En México,* 2006)

Over time, the Catholic Church allowed what is known as «palliated idolatry», which consists of mixing some indigenous beliefs and cultural elements with Catholic elements. This mixed cultural heritage is present, mainly in Mexico (*La Festividad Indígena Dedicada a Los Muertos En México,* 2006)

However, the Itzá academic, Eudave Eusebio, also pointed out some differences between the European Catholic ritual and the Mesoamerican celebration. While in 16th-century Europe, death is seen as a tragedy, where the life cycle ends (López, 2020). In Mesoamerica, the celebration of death or "festival of the dead" is attended. In other words, it is a ritual ceremony in which the person who dies by transcending to another space and time is celebrated. There is no end of the cycle, but a continuation in another phase. Indeed, one of the characteristics that differentiate Mexicans' connection with mortality is that death is not something to be dreaded or avoided, but rather accepted as a normal part of life.

Furthermore, their notion of time-space was cyclical in tandem with this legendary thinking about the genesis of the universe and the human person, whereas the Christian conception is linear and rational. For the Mesoamericans, human existence was an endless return, and it was essential to manifest the myth via rituals to ensure this repetition. In this sense, the Mesoamericans were steeped in a holy space-time.

2. The relationship between death and Mexicans

> "Aunque hoy no se reproduzca lo mismo que en el México antiguo, ya que no era solo una «fiesta», era una celebración que implicaba danza, música, ceremoniales a los muertos, y a la muerte misma, prácticas que en la actualidad y en la diversidad cultural se siguen realizando *".* (López, 2020)

Mexico is well-known for its exceptional death traditions. Mexicans' relationship with death is unique, historically defined by the richness of pre-Hispanic cultures and the merge of Catholic and Mesoamerican ceremonies. Mexicans, as we know, do not run away from death; rather, they live with it since for them, it is both bizarre and interesting. According to this viewpoint, mourning means both death and birth to maintain the continuity of the energy cycle, which gives a profound sense of togetherness and festivity, as well as grieving and melancholy. This blend is evident in every Mexican mourning ceremony.

The dead are reintroduced into the life-death cycle, and the surviving subject bears the burden of their loss. The mourner, unlike the gloomy, chooses to learn to live in lack (Brandes, 1998), because both the dead and the living continue to fulfil their destinies within the same cycle. The ceremony becomes a symbolic demand with two goals: to give the dead a home of their own and to assist survivors in grieving their loss.

Mexican mourning customs are distinguished by their symbolism, which has resulted from a blending of two cultures: 1) before the Spanish involvement in Mesoamerica in 1521, and 2) the evangelising foundation of New Spain, since typical Christian elements were incorporated into Mexicans through the process of envangelisation, such as crosses, candles, and incense.

Originally, Mesoamerican cultures had mourning and funeral traditions that were not Catholic and were regulated by a circular concept of life and death. Pre-Hispanic beliefs did not separate death from life. Because life was viewed as a transitional stage. Some indigenous cultures, such as Mexicans, "did not cling to life, and it was easy for them to die because it meant nothing more than the end of a situation" (Rodríguez, 2009).

Furthermore, the Mexicas[1] believed in four after-worlds, and the concept of resurrection was based on the premise that the energy released at death stayed among the living. According to Le Clezio (2008), the deceased do not die; they live with us, and their final resting place will be the location where they were burned.

[1] The Mexicas were a Nahuatl-speaking people who governed the Mexica Empire in the Valley of Mexico. The Mexicas are the originators of the name Mexico, which originally referred to the linked communities in what is now Mexico City.

As a result, Mesoamericans presented offerings that included some parts of the body, mainly bones (Sánchez, 2016). They thought that most of the dead went to Mictlán (one of the realms beyond death), where they lived, as they did on Earth (Denis et al., 2012). As a result, they believed that most altars would have to include items that the departed could require in the hereafter. Food offerings are offered every year on the date when the dead are believed to return and briefly cohabit with the living [see chapter 4.1. The "*ofrenda*"]. Curiously, these concepts of resurrection and life after death fit in well with Christian notions.

Furthermore, following the arrival of the Spanish evangelizers, the European Christian paradigm began to be imposed. Then came the first cemeteries, and hence the first burials, because the Catholic Church disallowed cremations at the time. Along with this first modification, other Catholic components such as tombstones, masses, and prayers were introduced. By combining the two traditions - religious syncretism - the Day of the Dead was born. Death took on a darker hue with the entrance of the Spaniards and the Catholic religion.

This union resulted in various changes, including the division of the Day of Death into two days. The feasts of the dead were originally forty days long for the Mexicas. On the one hand, the first twenty days were dedicated to deceased children, and now only the first of November is. On the other side, the final twenty days were dedicated to deceased adults, which is now only observed on November 2nd [2] (Nast, 2020). Furthermore, on November 1st, the "little feast of the dead" was held, during which food offerings were made and people went to church (Rodríguez, 2009). On November 2nd, "here was a great consumption of alcohol, everyone was given a license to drink; and only in the great festivals of pre-Hispanic Mexico was this concession made" (Rodríguez, 2009).

Mexican mourning traditions have incorporated the missing to deal with these losses. During this year's Day of the Dead celebration, relatives of the missing set up altars in memory of their loved ones.

Altars therefore serve not only as a place of reverence and prayer for the deceased but also as a forum for the exchange of information, memories, and grief. Offerings and altars are placed in cemeteries, on the streets, in front of courthouses, and in many urban centres. The community participates and rises to demand a place for the rites, for mourning, and for the incessant calls for justice, as well as a way to unite and reconnect with friends and family.

According to Lomnitz (2006), Death has become one of Mexico's totems, as seen by Calaveras poetry, (resembling the use of skeletal images in the European "dances of death" or Danse

[2] The first party, that is, the first twenty days, was called Miccailhuitzintli (*fiesta de los muertos pequeños*) and the second, the last twenty days, was called Huey Miccailhuitzintli (*fiesta de los muertos grande*).

Macabre, which was very popular in the late Middle Ages), satirical/political cartoons, and sugar skulls resemble a Tzompantli or Aztec burial. Altars are becoming increasingly popular. These contributions signify the ongoing exchanges between the living and the dead (EFE Agência, 2017). Mourning ceremonies create a national symbolic space for loss at the macro level of socialisation. Mexicans honour the dead by retaining their names and memories, thus perpetuating the culture of death. Learning to live with loss does not perpetuate grief but allows the rest of society to live.

Chapter II. The Spanish influence and the satirical impact on society

3. The iconographic art of the Day of the Dead: its origins

The Day of the Dead iconography is noteworthy for reflecting Mexicans' unique perspective on death, which is an «acceptance of death», as Patricia Fernández Kelly (1974) puts it. According to the author, the Day of the Dead craft represents "the enormous tenacity and wisdom of a people and a culture whose oppressed situation has not been an obstacle for the expression of a unique and creative philosophy of life and death". Furthermore, the presence of elements such as skulls and skeletons, according to author Paul Westheim (1983), is indeed a vivid example of the distinction between Mexican and Western attitudes toward death. According to Westheim, skulls have been used as an artistic movement or a popular fantasy for thousands of years, where locals find pleasure in depicting death [theme developed in chapter 3.2. – G) Skulls]. Arguably, the Christian tradition in Mexico has left an invaluable collection of artistic and literary testimonies of death. On the other hand, the fusion of European cultural patterns with pre-existing beliefs results in a third, completely individualised complex of practises and ideas (Fernández Kelly, 1974).

However, as George Kubler (1969) pointed out, artistic form, function, content, and meaning must be distinguished. That is, merely repeating skulls and skeletons as a motif does not imply cultural continuity. The function and meaning may differ depending on the historical era or ethnographic context. The following intrinsic characteristics are found in typical Day of the Dead iconographic art:

1. Art is *ephemeral*: all major items are made for momentary consumption (e.g., the *pan de muerto*, the sweet skulls).
2. It is *seasonal*: the images are particularly associated with the celebration of this celebration - All Saints' and All Souls' Days. Death depictions, which predominate during this period, are not incorporated into funerals or even the decoration of family tombs. When these elements are sold at other times, they are usually in a tourist context and always refer to the well-known holiday.
3. It has a *humorous tone*: the objects are meant to elicit laughter and joy rather than sadness and pain.
4. It is *secular*. The iconography of death has no sacred meaning for its consumers or producers. The objects themselves have little or no meaning, despite their inclusion in a sacred holiday celebration.

5. It is *commercial* because all the components of this festival are made to include them in tombs so that people can decorate them, and others can see them as they "walk" through the cemeteries. Furthermore, all objects are created to be sold in local stores and Mexican markets. To attract clients, urban retailers, for example, decorate their establishments with skulls and skeletons.
6. *Day of the Dead art is designed for the living, not the dead*. Although this art is used to decorate tombs and household altars on occasion, it is only used in this form during the Day of the Dead. Funerals and tombs are not imbued with this celebration's iconography. Objects and artistic representations associated with the Day of the Dead are mostly acquired and exchanged between living people to strengthen social ties. These were eventually used for commercial advertising as well as political and social satire.
7. The art is *playful* and designed to be played with and handled, as many of the objects are flexible.
8. The objects are typically *small*, *light*, and *portable*, allowing families to easily assemble and disassemble the built altars.
9. A large portion of Day of the Dead art is *urban* and circulated among Mexico's cultural elite. Although it is associated with a cultural and artistic tradition, it is manufactured and created in the city for consumption by city dwellers and tourists.

Day of the Dead art is integrated into Mexicans' social and cultural lives in unique ways. Any discussion of how and why this art exists, as well as the reasons for its prominence in contemporary Mexican life, must acknowledge the importance of function as well as form. Each element has its meaning and origin, and as time and external influences change, two images can be used and interpreted very differently.

3.1. Pre-Columbian representations of skulls and skeletons

Because ancient Mesoamerican people contributed most of the Day of the Dead iconography, we must consider the fundamental fact that the ancient world was remarkably diverse, complete, and enduring. In other words, we cannot speak of the pre-Columbian world as if it were a single undifferentiated artistic and symbolic entity. The depiction of death in art varies from culture to culture. According to scholars, "the image of death is omnipresent in Central and Pre-Hispanic Mexican art" (Childs and Altman, 1982).

Human skulls and bones are ubiquitous in Mayan death symbolism, making them universal pictorial representations of death. Additionally, the Maya employed a distinct iconographic image

of decomposing corpses, marked by black spots on the victims' cheeks. Likewise, throughout the Maya area, death was represented by the victims' closed eyes and open mouths. For example, in the Mayan region, in Uxmal, there is a tzompantli, with skulls and long bones crossed. In addition to the *tzompantli*, there is an independent wall in Tula known as the coatepantli, or «Wall of the Serpent» (Fig.1), on which stand tall and rigid figures of warriors, the famous Atlanteans. The wall, possibly related to the cult of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli (the supreme god Quetzalcòatl in the form of Venus, the morning star), is decorated with a series of carved stone panels showing feathered serpents devouring human skeletons. The most striking features of these skeletons are their elongated limbs and prominent joints, which allow for body flexibility; they are huge lithic types of wooden and clay toy skeletons[3], which, nowadays, we can easily find in any Day of Dead shop or market.

Figure 1. Coatepantli or 'Wall of the Serpents" at Tula, Hidalgo, Mexico, Post-Classic period (980-1160 AD). Photograph by Jean Pierre Courau

Furthermore, because the Aztecs held most of the power at the time of the Spanish conquest, it is plausible to believe that their iconography, rather than that of their predecessors, was what carried over into colonial Mexican art and exerted such an influence on folk art associated with the Day of the Dead (Brandes, 1998).

Scholars point to at least four elements of Aztec art that demonstrate the indigenous focus on death: 1. First is the well-preserved tzompantli, found at the site of the Great Temple at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan[4] (Fig.2); 2. The numerous prominent stone sculptures of deities are

[3] Like small toys, these skeletons appear animated, with their legs awkwardly crossed and their arms outstretched.

[4] On each side of this structure are five horizontal rows of sixteen stone skulls, forming a tight-knit design that completely covers the platform's base.

represented with skull-like features. The figure of Coatlicue, also known as Ilamatecuhtli, goddess of the earth, life, and death, whose face usually appears as a skull, is one of the most famous (Fig.3); 3. Mictecacihuatl, the goddess of the underworld and the dead is shown in stone sculptures with her face in the shape of a skull (Matos Moctezuma, 1992). One of the most famous artefacts from the Aztec Great Temple is an enormous circular monolith, showing Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess, decapitated, with limbs spread across the entire stone slab; 4. The Aztecs left skull offerings that were discovered at the Great Temple (Carrasco, 1992). These are real human skulls with shell and pyrite eyes and sacrificial flint knives placed into them to simulate tongues and noses.

Figure 2. Templo Mayor in Mexico City. Tzompantli (skull wall) with 240 skulls (1500). Photograph by Wolfgang Suber

Figure 3. Aztec statue of Coatlicue, the earth goddess from the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico

Finally, the Mayan, Toltec, and Aztec civilizations made extensive use of this art. The Aztecs depict skulls but not interior body skeletons, whereas their forefathers, the Toltecs, used both. However, skull and skeleton iconography in Mesoamerica is not directly associated with mortuary rituals. At Tenochtitlan, for example, we have an abundance of real and representational skulls and skeletons that could have directly influenced church and folk art in colonial and postcolonial Mexico. Skull iconography at Tenochtitlan, on the other hand, exhibits stylized rigidity and seriousness that differs greatly from art associated with the Day of the Dead. Contextually, the Aztecs' use of skulls could not be more dissimilar to Mexicans' use of skulls in today's Day of the Dead celebration.

Given the variety and complexity of skull and skeleton representations in ancient Mesoamerica, it is impossible to dismiss their cumulative impact on colonial and postcolonial art. Nor can we

claim that any culture or civilization has contributed to contemporary representations of skulls and skeletons more than any other. Simultaneously, it is impossible to draw clear lines of stylistic and thematic influence from antiquity to the present (Brandes, 1998). Mesoamerican cultures were diverse, and each displayed a strong concern with death in its way. However, the same happened in Europe during the time of the Spanish conquest.

4. Christian Depictions of Death in New Spain

As previously stated, skulls and skeletons were just a few of the many ways Mesoamerican communities represented death. Because the archaeological record in this region is discontinuous, complex, and incomplete, it is not possible to determine whether skulls and skeletons were more common death symbols. Similar questions arise when we consider Europe during the time of the Spanish conquest. The essay "The Death Theme in Spanish and Mexican Arts" by José Moreno Villa (1986) surveys the theme from the 15th to the 20th centuries, focusing on Spain. Nevertheless, we are presented with stone sarcophagi, well-dressed nobles, and clerics; paintings of maidens and carved and painted figures of the dead Christ hanging on the cross, cradled in his mother's arms.

According to the author Bialostocki (1987), "cruel death on the cruciform gallows" dominated Christian thought and imagination: "Since the beginning of the Middle Ages, the image of the dying God in the form of a suffering man has been the main theme of Christian art." However, artists in early modern Europe were not limited to this theme. Skulls and skeletons were prominent features of European iconography during the colonial period and beyond. According to Bialostocki (ibid.: 28), "the great period of ornamentation of skulls and skeletons corresponds to the Baroque period," that is, an artistic period that corresponds with the Spanish colonial era - "which introduces an inflation of these elements." Allegorical representations of Man in eighteenth-century New Spain, as in the rest of Europe, frequently included a skeleton as the image of death. Another popular motif was the vanity tree[5], which usually depicted a young man, the sinner, reclining or sitting at the base of a tree (Fig.4) Invariably, figures such as the devil, angels, and skeletons wielding an axe, or scythe surround the sinner (Museo Nacional de Arte, 1994).

[5] The vanity tree derives from engravings by the 16th-century Flemish artist, Hieronymus Wierix, who directly influenced artists working in the New World during the Baroque era.

Figure 4. El árbol del pecado. Siglo XVIII. Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA

Funerary catafalques in 18th-century New Spain also depicted animated skeletal figures. On the one hand, the catafalque of El Carmen, which is on display at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Toluca, portrays numerous scenes of the skeletal figure of death. Several panels show the skeleton wearing a garment; most of these also show the skeleton speaking, an act symbolized by white bands, tied with Latin words, oozing from its mouth (ibid.:272-76). On the other hand, the catafalque of Santa Prisea, housed in the Museo de Arte Virreinal in Taxco, contains equally animated skeletons: one is sitting on a tree stump in contemplative mode, with legs crossed and head resting on one hand with a scythe present, a bow, and arrow (ibid.:277-80) (Fig.5).

Figure 5. Panel from an eighteenth-century catafalque, housed in Toluca. The angel declares, "Death runs with time". Photograph by Stanley Brandes.

Skulls and skeletons were common in European art and beyond, even during the pre-baroque period. For example, the open-air chapel at Tlalmanalco, east of Mexico City, built by the Franciscans in 1550-60, depicts dozens of skulls. Human figures dressed in Renaissance garb and holding hands are depicted on each of the central columns. According to Curiel Méndez (1987), all ornamentation at Tlalmanalco is designed to effectively demonstrate the 'Triumph of Death over Humanity'(Fig.6). Concerning Curiel: “There are skeletons, skulls with remains of flesh and intact heads, all with different expressions of horror before the inevitable triumph of death” (ibid.:156-57).

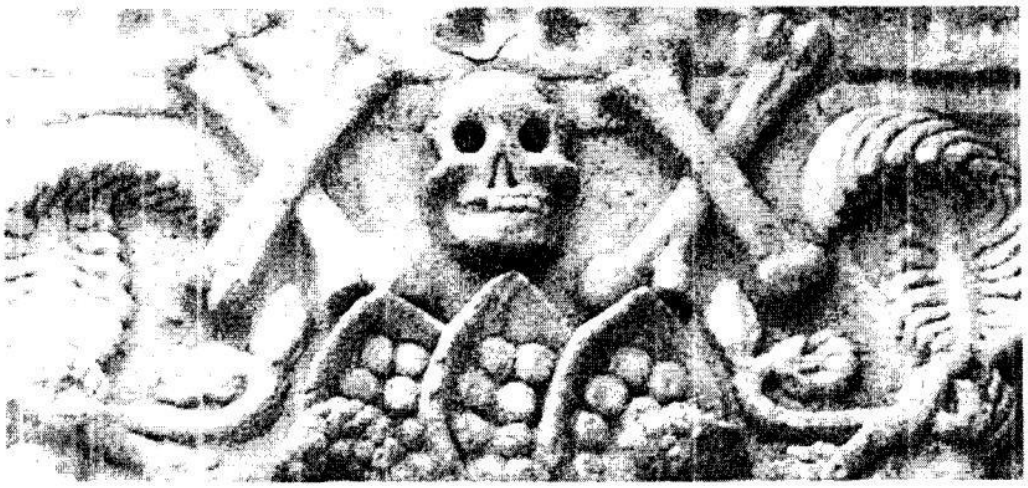

Figure 6. Detail from the open-air chapel at Tlalmanalco. Photograph by Stanley Brandes

Curiel interprets these figures as a version of the Dance of Death (Fig.7). The representation of holding hands, as in the case of the Dance of Death, is its main evidence. This feature, along with the alternation of skulls and plants, gives the entire sculptural set a resemblance, if not a replica, of the Dance of Death.

Figure 7. The Dance of Death (1493) by Michael Wolgemut, from the Nuremberg Chronicle of Hartmann Schedel

Indeed, from the second quarter of the 15th century onwards, the Dance of Death was quite popular in Europe. When it comes to its origins, art historian James Clark (1950) claims that "whether our starting point is in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Italy, or Spain, we find all the signposts pointing in the same direction", referring to the 1424 Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris. However, other historians believe that the Dance of Death motif is much older, as it is a textual and artistic elaboration of ancient Germanic mythology (Minns, 1922).

There are numerous variations on the Dance of Death. According to Robert Wark (1966), the work's pictorial side consists of a series of human figures accompanied by a skeleton or corpse that symbolises Death. As a result, Death is frequently depicted as a grotesque dance to which it leads the human character, who may be of any social class: Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Bishop, Duke, or Parish priest. The implication of this presentation is quite clear: death visits all people, regardless of class or social status. James Clark claims (1950) "The dance is a symbol of death, nothing more. Poet and artist alike intended to portray in allegorical form the inevitability of death, and the equality of all men in death".

Dance of Death pictographs from the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, like the funerary catafalques of eighteenth-century New Spain, depicted artistically skeletal figures filled with human emotions - hostility, joy, insolence, and stealth. Furthermore, the skeletons interact with the living and inhabit their world, leading us to believe that the Dance of Death was primarily didactic. The Dance of Death is the only significant forerunner of Day of the Dead art that includes a humorous element. Death figures in the Dance of Death adopt a humorous tone by mocking the victims, who are frequently members of the social elite, such as clergy and nobility.

In the current case of the Day of the Dead, death itself is mocked rather than the victim. Iconography is scarce or absent in the countless cemeteries where vigils are held in honour of the

dead, as well as on tombstones. Mexicans do not mock the death of their loved ones. Death humour is most common in anonymous contexts such as shops and markets where skeletons, skulls, and coloured paper cut-outs are sold, as well as newspapers where various public figures are portrayed in the form of skeletons and publicly displayed (Sandstrom and Sandstrom, 1986). Humorous iconography is a product and is suited to a single commemorative moment, the Day of the Dead. For this reason, much of this iconography can be classified as ephemeral art.

4.1. Artistic Humour on the Day of the Dead

No other predominantly Catholic country in the world celebrates All Saints' Day with the artistic and comedic fervour that Mexico does. All Saints' and All Souls' Day began to take on a humorous tone in New Spain at an unknown date. By the mid-eighteenth century, the holiday had acquired its distinct Mexican name - the Day of the Dead - as well as amusing sugar figurines (Brandes, 1998). We can then conclude that the Day of the Dead took on its current flavour at that time.

Despite reports that sugar figurines first appeared in the 1840s, there is evidence that they existed a century earlier. Capuchin friar Francisco de Ajofrin (1958) in the 1740s wrote:

> Before the Day of the Dead, they sell a thousand figures of little sheep, lambs of sugar paste [today called alfeiiique], which they name ofrenda, and it is a gift which must be given obligatorily to boys and girls of the houses where one is known. They also sell coffins, tombs, and a thousand figures of the dead, clerics, monks, nuns of all denominations, bishops, and horsemen, for which there is a large market and a colourful fair in the merchants' portals, where the crowd of men and women from Mexico City is incredible on the evening before and the day of All Saints.

These objects, in addition to being associated with the celebration, implied that they served as children's toys, so they were probably funny or, at the very least, designed similarly to those of today.

Indeed, the predecessors of humorous popular art appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was around this time that broadsides known as calaveras (skulls) began to appear in large numbers. Childs and Altman (1982) see this development as a direct result of the freedom of the press that came with Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821. Precisely, the first illustrated newspaper in Mexico was called *El Calavera*[6], and it first appeared in January 1847. *El Calavera* specialised in satirising the political current affair of the time, particularly the nation's political leaders, through drawings, verses, and essays.

[6] Probably related to the meaning of the word in Spanish: se RAE https://dle.rae.es/calavera

Everything started changing when the illustrator José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) was hired. Each year for the occasion of the Day of the Dead, Posada developed several images of skulls [subject more developed in chapter 4.3.]; these "vivid and lively skeletons and skulls with grinning teeth [were shown] dancing, cycling, playing the guitar, plying their trades, drinking, masquerading, and doing dozens of other comical activities" (Wollen, 1989). Posada, according to Wollen, is part of the broadsides artist's broader phenomenon, part of "the entire repertoire of nineteenth-century urban popular art". Posada, like the rest of this art, addressed specific historical circumstances in the national scene in which it found itself: a new country with an unstable political framework in which normal democratic means of criticism were severely hampered. As a result, Posada was able to find a market to sell its art, which was a restless and dissatisfied urban population looking for a way to criticise its political leaders. As a result, Posada's art became a symbol of popular resistance throughout Mexican history. Indeed, "humorous and illustrated obituaries provided the common people with the opportunity, without fear of censorship or retaliation, to express their dissatisfaction with political and social leaders and to define their grievances, real or imagined" (William Beezley, 1987).

Posada and its skulls became a symbol of Mexico in the 1930s (Fig.8) The skulls' irreverence matched Mexican revolutionary ideology. Furthermore, the international artistic community declared satirical skulls and skeletons to be a form of high art. Posada's work, according to Liza Bakewell (1995), met the needs of a 'cultural nationalism' that began with the Mexican Revolution and continues to this day.

Although Posada's art was widely disseminated, reproduced, transformed, and mimicked in non-religious contexts, he used the Day of the Dead as a creative stimulus and, presumably, a commercial opportunity. It is not surprising, then, that Posada's satirical images, which were the immediate result of critical developments in Mexico's political history, were well-received at the time. Both its thematic content and its humorous tone were consistent with the festival's already-established artistic standards (Wollen, 1989). Posada became nationally and internationally famous as a result of the promotional efforts of well-known artists and writers, both inside and outside of Mexico. Thus, Posada's art was popularised for the second time by the country's artistic elite, who saw in his images the meaning of Mexico itself. Posada's disseminating role was critical, as it gave credibility to the pretensions of being part of an authentically Mexican artistic tradition, crossing both the class divide and the historical division of the Revolution itself, while also ensuring the tradition's modernity by aligning it with the rebirth of the popular imagination among the European avant-garde.

Chapter III. The fundamental iconographic elements and how they are used in the celebrations

5. The typical iconographic elements of the Day of the Dead

The friar Ajofrin is responsible for what little we know about the Day of the Dead figurines in the colonial era. Ajofrin claims that in the middle of the 18th century, the people of the Valley of Mexico, which was ruled by the Aztecs at the time of the conquest, purchased sugar paste costumes for the occasion, and we also know that some of these figurines incorporated mortuary symbolism.

Other ancient Mesoamerican peoples' artistic images, such as the Maya and Toltecs, might hold a possible interest. However, these peoples differed so much among themselves, both in iconography and in space and time, that their influence on New Spain's colonial patterns was minimal. According to the chronicler Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, the wooden images were moulded into human form after being covered with tzoalli or amaranth seed paste (Brandes, 1998). It's tempting to see anthropomorphic mass figurines as forerunners of the sugar candies sold on the Day of the Dead today. The acceptance of anthropomorphic foods by residents of the Valley of Mexico during the colonial era is most likely due to the prevalence of tzoalli imagery in the Aztec ritual.

We must add the Spanish ritual practise of offering food in cemeteries in honour of the dead to the Aztec custom of consuming anthropomorphic sweets. For example, beginning in the 1500s in the province of Zamora, more precisely in Old Castile, Day of the Dead celebrations required a catafalque in the chancel, surrounded by candles and twenty-five loaves of bread (Lorenzo Pinar, 1991). There are testimonies from medieval Mallorca that document the practise of placing bread on tombs on All Souls' Day.

On All Souls´ Day, two *corteras of padets morts* - Catalan for «dead bread» - are also offered to the deceased, according to a document issued by the Guild of Goldsmiths of Barcelona on October 15th, 1671 (“Pan de Muerto” will be explored in segment 4.2.). Furthermore, in this document, in addition to references to dead bread, the term “Diada dels Morts” that is, Day of the Dead, is used to refer to the Day of the Dead. These are thus examples of evidence that bread and sweets were part of the Day of the Dead celebration in Spain before and during the colonial era in New Spain.

We can assume that during the 16th and 17th centuries, this tradition was passed down and expanded among the Mexican people. However, we can assume that when the Spaniards taught the local people the rites of All Saints and All Souls, food offerings were an important part of

what they taught. The indigenous communities, who were used to making such offerings, incorporated them into their offerings to ancestors and saints. What distinguishes Mexican offerings from colonial times to the present is that many of them explicitly reference funerary motifs such as skulls, skeletons, and coffins. Mexico is the only country where sugar is the primary material used to carve Day of the Dead figurines. The distinctive nature of sugar production and distribution in New Spain had a significant impact on the ritual foods consumed on All Saints and All Souls Days (Brandes, 1997).

Because of sugar's unique role in New Spain's economy, Mexicans used sugar in the same way that Europeans used edible, mouldable substances like bread and marzipan, or as ancient Mexicans used tzoalli. When discussing the significance of skulls, skeletons, coffins, and the like, it is critical to remember the Valley of Mexico - the pre-Columbian and Spanish seat of power during the Conquest and beyond. We have seen that both Aztecs and Europeans were used to these images as religious symbols, although Aztec and European images lacked humour.

Numerous epidemics and wars struck the indigenous peoples of the Valley of Mexico in the first century after European contact, and it is reasonable to speculate that the Day of the Dead became ritualistically elaborate in Mexico because of these losses of life (Foster, 1960). Mortuary-themed sugar figurines had a profound psychological impact during colonial times. Despite its ephemeral nature, this symbology allowed for both confronting and denying death, as well as humorous images. In other words, humour most likely helped the people of New Spain cope with their dire demographic circumstances by allowing them to mock and implicitly deny the tragic reality they and their ancestors faced.

Indeed, during the colonial period, the figures of death were iconographic descendants of Mesoamerican and European civilizations. Figurines were especially available and appropriate for the Day of the Dead, a communal holiday commemorating humanity's common destiny that was never associated with funerals, honouring the death of relatives. This mortuary art was not created by a strange Mexican vision of death. Rather, specific demographic and political circumstances spawned commercial interests, allowing them to thrive in the twentieth century. Above all, the massive proliferation of Day of the Dead art is responsible for the well-known stereotype of the death-obsessed Mexican.

As Childs and Altman (1982) have pointed out, the sugar skulls and skeleton toys that predominate in rural areas of Mexico during the festival represent an artistic and religious tradition of the Aztecs and Spaniards during the Conquest, as well as the artistic, and social, and

political mission associated with José Guadalupe Posada's[7] illustrations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Posada used skulls, skeletons, and other funerary images because it was allowed by a well-established artistic tradition in Mexican popular art. In essence, Day of the Dead provided Posada with a fertile artistic opportunity, though the purpose and impact of his art differed from the sugar candies that emerged during colonial times.

Indeed, it grew into a significant commercial enterprise and thus took on a life of its own. Mexican skulls and skeletons, such as Posada's reproductions, sell well to the international community and stimulate business among Mexican consumers, as they are displayed in shop windows and at local markets each year. These two distinct, though inextricably linked, art mortuary traditions – the first stemming from colonial religious and demographic imperatives, the second from political and journalistic developments - are now regarded by Mexicans and tourists alike as an emblematic phenomenon of Mexico itself.

Skulls, skeletons, and calaveras have become Mexico's brand image, so whenever one of these elements appears on television, in a film, or in an advertisement, these three elements are associated with the Day of the Dead. Although many people don't know its meaning or history, they automatically make a connection with this celebration. In recent years, it has become popular, especially in urban centres, for actors to paint their faces to resemble a skull or even Posada´s Catrina, as happens in the International Day of the Dead Parade.

5.1. The *ofrenda*

In preparation for this celebration and, as a hallmark of this festivity, *ofrendas*[8] begins to take place sometime in advance. The *ofrendas* are seen as a ritual that can be a sacred act, but also a profane one: the popular tradition is the symbiosis between sacred devotion and profane practice.

The Day of the Dead offering consists of various elements being shared with the deceased. This act of sharing is viewed as a direct way of communicating with deceased family members, to dialogue with their memories and lives. As a result, the offering is a reunion with a ritual that invokes memory (INPI, 2019). The offering is usually represented by a large, decorated altar with a photograph of the deceased, incense or copal, candles, water, and the typical *cempaschil* flower.

[7] Posada's art and its offshoots provided a method of "peaceful protest" (Brandes, 1977).
[8] The quality and degree of ornamentation of the *ofrendas* depend on regional traditions, family wealth, recent deaths, or the year's harvest.

Other items in the tomb may include bread for the dead, confetti, traditional sweets, candles, and, finally, food. More concretely, all the main objects have the main objective of symbolizing the four elements of life: water, air, fire, and earth.

The *ofrenda* presents a cultural synthesis of indigenous and European traditions imposed by Hispanics. *Ofrendas* have been made since prehistoric times. In the case of the Mexicas, civilization had already provided the deceased with food and water for their four-year journey to Mictlán (Xiu, 2019).

Until the last century, the Day of the Dead was purely religious. The significance of this commemoration lay in attending church and visiting the pantheon, where loved ones' tombs were decorated. Water, the *cempaschil* flower, for example, was already present on the altars, as were elements of Catholic worship such as the cross, candles, and holy water (Xiu, 2019). Both beliefs merged over time, giving rise to the modern-day celebration.

5.2. The altar and its elements

Altars traditionally have between two and seven levels, each with specific items – the two-level ones symbolize earth and sky; those with three levels represent Purgatory, Earth, and Heaven. While the seven-level altar represents the levels through which the soul must pass to reach Heaven, for the Aztec culture, or it may represent the seven deadly sins, for the Catholic tradition.

- The 1st level (ground floor) is a cross made of flowers, seeds, and fruits.
- On the 2nd level is the photograph(s) of the deceased person(s) to whom the altar is dedicated.
- On the 3rd level, the deceased's favourite fruits and dishes are placed.
- The 4th level includes "*pan de muerto*" – a type of traditional bread offered as food and consecration.
- At the 5th level, salt symbolizes purification.
- The 6th level is dedicated to the souls in purgatory.
- At the 7th level is the image of the family devotee saint.

In addition, other elements are distributed around the altar, such as incense, candles, water, shredded paper, flowers, and other objects of affection for the deceased person.

The altars are erected a few days before the 1st and 2nd of November and remain until the 3rd. However, each day has a different meaning: on the night of October 31st, white candles are lit to welcome the ancestors; the first of November is the apparition day of souls who died in infancy; on November 2nd (All Souls' Day), the spirits of the dead arrive at night to enjoy the food and

drink offered to them and, finally, on November 3rd, the last candle is lit to say goodbye to the deceased, and the offering is withdrawn.

Pan de Muerto

Dead bread (Fig. 8) is a type of sweet bread that can be decorated in a variety of ways, ranging from simple round shapes to skulls and bone shapes made from the same bread. It is then topped with sugar and aniseed.

This is one of the most crucial aspects of the offering. Its shape, with some symbols on top, represents the skulls of the dead, and the orange blossom flavour is a way of remembering the dead. According to some traditions, the vaulted top of the bread represents a grave (Delgadillo, 2016). This occurs because the bread of the dead typically contains skulls or crossbones, which are frequently depicted in a circle to represent the circle of life (Brandes, 1998).

Figure 8. Pan de Muerto.

Indeed, the *pan de muerto* originates from the *pan de ánimas* ("soul bread"); a votive product that, in certain areas such as Castile and Aragon, was prepared specifically for All Saints' Day and All Souls´ Day, to honour the loved ones. The bread was then placed on the grave and blessed by the local priest[9]. During the reign of New Spain, the conquerors used the *pan de ánimas* as an *ofrenda* for their loved ones, and the natives adopted it as a tradition.

The dough of dead bread is mostly made of wheat, which came from Europe. However, in pre-Hispanic times – during offerings to the gods and the dead – the natives ate *tzoali*, *papalotlaxcali*, and *huitlatamali*, which are a kind of bread made with corn dough. Therefore, the Spaniards had no problem replacing corn flour with wheat flour.

Several Mexican public institutions deny the dead bread's Spanish-Christian origins, instead attributing it to pre-Hispanic preparations. The Instituto Nacional dos Povos Indígenas, for example, associates *pan de muerto* with *papalotlaxcalli*. According to Fray Bernardino de

[9] The bread of the dead was also known as pan blessed, as the bread was blessed by the priest.

Sahagún's chronicles, the *papalotlaxcalli* was a tortilla (*tlaxcalli*) shaped like a butterfly (*papalotl*) that was given to women who died during childbirth or to *Cihuapipiltin*[10]. In an essay published by the National Institute of Anthropology and History, he claims that "continuing to think that [the pan de muerto] is a pre-Hispanic tradition means that we understand nothing, as it is profoundly Roman" (Nast, 2020).

The *pan de muerto* is eaten on the Day of Death, at the tomb, or the *ofrenda*. As part of the celebration, loved ones eat *pan de muerto* and the deceased's favourite foods, as it is believed that spirits do not eat, but observe their essence.

Flowers

Flowers are used as decoration to symbolise the beauty and transience of life. They are a festival symbol because of their vibrant colours and aromas and their symbolism of purity and tenderness (Servicio de Información Agroalimentaria y Pesquera, 2019). The flowers decorate, flavour, and colour the place where, according to tradition, the deceased's soul temporarily returns. During the celebrations, families clean and decorate the tombs with colourful roses and sunflower wreaths. These typically integrate, for example, a large arch placed in front of the altar as a way for souls to pass through and visit the living.

The *Flor de Cempasúchil* is the festival's signature flower; it derives from the Nahuatl Cempohualxochitl, which translates as "twenty-petal flower". It is thought to attract and guide spirits because a path is traced through its petals, which, according to beliefs, directs the deceased's soul from the entrance of the house to the altar, as they are said to contain the colour and fiery scent of the sun.

The *Flor de Cempasúchil* emerged from the love story between a young Aztec couple, Xóchitl and Huitzilin. Legend has it that when both were still children, the romance between them began to emerge. Every afternoon, the young lovers would climb to the top of a mountain to give flowers to Tonatiuh, the Aztec sun god. The deity smiled at the couple for the offering, likewise, Xóchitl and Huitzilin swore eternal love. When war came to the city, Huitzilin had to go to war. A short time later, her companion's death was confirmed, leaving young Xóchitl in deep pain. Xóchitl went to the top of the mountain for the last time to beg Tonatiuh to unite her with her partner forever. Moved, Tonatiuh threw a ray at it and transformed it into a yellow flower like the sun, on which a hummingbird landed – Huitzilin – and it opened into twenty petals, releasing an intense aroma (*Leyenda de La Flor de Cempasúchil, La Flor de Los Muertos*, 2022).

[10] According to Mexica mythology, they are incarnated female spirits who are said to return to earth as the souls of noble women who died during childbirth. They were honoured as fallen warriors for losing their lives during childbirth.

Thus, the Aztec couple's love is said to last as long as hummingbirds and cempasuchil flowers exist. As a result, the *Flor de Cempasúchil* has been ingrained in popular culture and Day of the Dead celebrations. More than thirty-five flower species are thought to exist in Mexico[11].

A) Photo of the departed loved ones

The portrait of the deceased suggests that the soul will visit on the night of November 2nd. The image is placed on the highest part of the altar. Normally, her back is turned, and a mirror is placed in front of her so that the deceased can only see the reflection of his relatives. It's interesting to see how the relatives place the photos of the deceased on the altar in an altar position as if they were worshipping them as saints, occupying the same privileged position.

B) Candles and lights

The candles symbolise fire and the light of hope and must always be in pairs. The four cross-shaped candles symbolise the four cardinal points so that the deceased can orient himself to his house.

C) The Crosses

Crosses are a symbol introduced by Spanish missionaries to integrate the doctrine with indigenous peoples. To remind them of faith, on Ash Wednesday they are told the phrase: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return”, which reminds you that you are returning to the land from which you came. The cross is at the top of the altar next to the image of the deceased and can be made of salt, ash, or chalk.

D) Copal

The resin of copal, a tropical tree, is lit as incense on altars during the Día de Muertos celebration. In general, aromas are very important in setting up the offering of the dead, as it is believed that souls are not guided by the same senses and stimuli as we are. Therefore, scents are considered more suitable to attract them. Copal is also used to purify souls.

E) Papel Picado

The use of this type of paper is frequently in the form of a garland that is hung or located in different parts of the altar and has its origin in Aztec customs. It is usually cut with silhouettes of skulls, flowers, food, tombstones, and words related to the Day of the Dead and on several occasions, they contain illustrations by the artist José Guadalupe Posada, author of the iconic Catrina.

Tradition requires that each offering have the four elements represented: earth, air, fire, and water. This element represents air. Many pieces of paper are placed in purple, which symbolizes mourning.

[11] It is worth noting that, despite being a flower native to Mexico, China is the largest producer because it is used for medicinal purposes.

F) Water

Water is important because, among other meanings, it reflects the purity of the soul and the continuous regeneration of life. The offering is presented as a glass full of water that serves the spirit to quench his/her thirst after the journey he made from the world of the dead. It represents one of the four elements of nature, and a cup with water is placed with the belief that the deceased will drink it to alleviate his thirst.

G) The skulls

Skulls are the most well-known symbols of the Mexican holiday, representing life and protection from evil spirits. Unlike the gloomy picture conveyed by the skull in most other civilizations, particularly in Christian ones, the Mexican skull is colourful, stylized, and highly ornamented with drawings and flowers.

The skulls are pre-Hispanic materials that were used in Aztec gifts to their gods to preserve life. The Aztecs, for example, had a custom of retaining the skulls of their family and friends as trophies, believing that the head was where positive memories and recollections of the deceased were held. In addition, tzompantlis were stone constructions used to exhibit the skulls of captives of battle or human sacrifices. Because civilizations believed in a spiritual afterlife, these skulls were an offering to Mictlantecuhtli, the god of the underworld, who would assure safe passage to the place he ruled.

Furthermore, Spanish religious customs included offering food in cemeteries in honour of the dead; in Aztec commemorations of the departed or deities, wooden sculptures were made and then covered with *tzoalli* or amaranth seed paste. Eventually, the combination of these anthropomorphic dough figurines with Spanish ceremonial practice culminated in the Mexican tradition of edible Day of the Dead figurines.

The *Calaveras dulces* (Fig.9) are skull-shaped sweets created from an *alfeñique* paste (sugar, hot water, and lemon). Anyone who donates a sugar skull may earn a spot in paradise, according to legend. Sugar *calaveritas* are part of the well-known *ofrenda* and represent the element «earth», along with other dishes such as mole, chocolate, and dead bread. Because sugar skulls represented a departed soul, their names were engraved on their foreheads and placed in an ofrenda or tombstone to commemorate the return of a specific spirit.

The sugar skull artwork is embellished in the Mexican folk-art style. Because the pieces are small and handcrafted in the craftsmen's houses, the job is exhausting and painstaking. However, artisans are disappearing, with these objects being manufactured and imported by large companies with the capacity to produce thousands of units to fill the countless orders that arrive because of the

celebration's internationalization, as well as the exponential increase in the number of sales to tourists visiting Mexico City at this time.

Furthermore, calaveras can be sarcastic poetry. Rhymes, often known as «literary skulls», are amusing epitaphs created by people who play with real-life personalities, pointing to unusual traits of the person in question. These skulls are frequently dedicated to politicians. The names of the departed or, in certain circumstances, live persons, may have been jokingly scrawled on the foreheads of the skulls.

As we can see, calaveras can come in a variety of sizes and forms, be portrayed as sweets, sarcastic lyrics, or even assume physical forms as costumes. The most renowned image linked with this occasion, however, is José Guadalupe Posada's *Calavera Garbancera* or *La Catrina*, which became one of the most important symbols of Mexico.

Figure 9. Calaveras de dulce (2011) by Carlos Adampol Galindo, Mexico

5.3. *La Catrina,* more than 100 years of history

"Death is democratic. In the end, regardless of whether you are white, dark, rich, or poor, we all end up as skeletons". - José Guadalupe Posada

Catrina is a key element in Mexican culture. It was created in 1910 by the illustrator and caricaturist José Guadalupe Posada[12]. This can be present in family offers, appear as a ceramic doll in a shop window, or appear as a costume in the Day of the Dead parade.

Indeed, initially, Catrina was known simply as *Calavera Garbancera*, because "*garbancera*[13]" was a social critique against a group of women who, enriched during the Porfiriato through the sale of «*garbanzo*», aspired to form part of an elite taken by appearance and copying European fashions, in particular Spanish and French, denying their cultural heritage (Ríos et al. pp.54- 56). In other words, this female figure became a mockery of the Mexican aristocracy that belittled its origins and customs, valuing European customs. The ubiquitous *Catrina* continues, even today, to be a satirical symbol of those who value foreign status and customs over their Mexican roots. These "beautiful cats", "beautiful *garbanceras*" women, who despite their efforts to dress in an elegant and sophisticated way would end up being "calaveras *or cráneos del montón*" carried away by death. For many Mexicans, *Catrina* symbolizes pride in Mexican and indigenous culture.

The figure of *Catrina*[14] first appeared under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz as a satire on the upper social class. Incidentally, Posada's illustrations were often presented with images of skulls and skeletons to represent the only truly democratic state of human beings: death and life after death (Alvarado, 2022).

Posada describes her as "*sólo son huesos, lleva un sombrero francés con sus plumas de avestruz"* (Revista Campus Cultural, 2011) which, effectively, portrays how this figure usually appears - naked and wearing a hat with European-style feathers (Fig.10). Additionally, the skull has the function of *memento mori*, intended to remind that social and economic differences mean nothing in the face of death. The portrait directly overturns class or status differences, marking it of great political and social importance.

[12] José Guadalupe Posada, February 2nd, 1852, Aguascalientes – January 20th, 1913, Mexico City. He was a Mexican political lithographer who used his relief print to produce popular illustrations.
[13] *Garbancero*: 1. Belonging or relative to the chickpea. 4. Ordinary and vulgar person or thing. In: https://dle.rae.es/garbancero

[14] The name «Catrina» comes from the jargon "catrín", which refers to an elegant and well-dressed man, usually accompanied by a woman with the same characteristics.

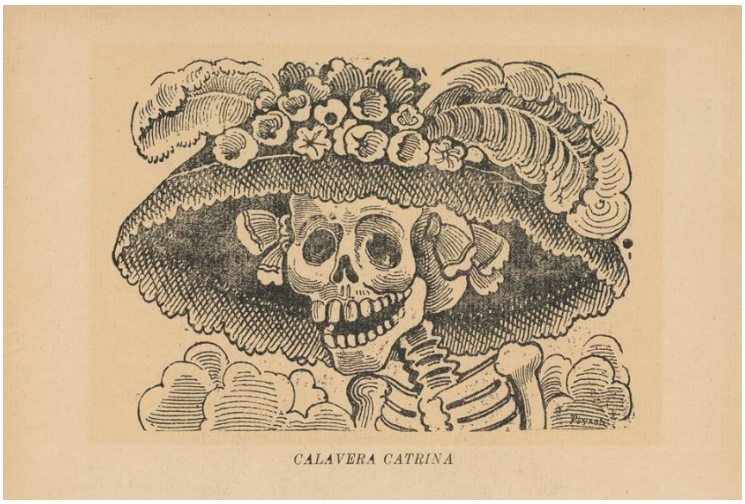

Figure 10. La Calavera Catrina by José Posada. 1910

The character created by Posada became one of the main symbols of the artistic manifestations of the Day of the Dead in Mexico and Mexican culture in general (Ríos et al. 47–58). In addition, this character gained more prominence and was immortalized when the artist Diego de Rivera[15] included the figure of *La Catrina* in his mural - *Sueño de un Domingo en la tarde en la Alameda*[16] (Díaz, 2020). The masterpiece, which portrays 400 years of Mexican history, illustrates the end of an era due to the Revolutionary War and the beginning of a new, modern, and egalitarian country (Fig.11).

Figure 11. Mural de Diego de Rivera: Sueño de un Domingo por la tarde en la Alameda, 1947

[15] Diego Maria de la Concepcion Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera and Barrientos Acosta y Rodriguez, December 8, 1886, Guanajuato – November 24, 1957, Mexico City, was a Mexican Cubist realist painter and muralist. He was married to the artist Frida Kahlo.

[16] The painting can be seen on the walls of the Museo Mural Diego Rivera in Parque Alameda, Mexico City.

The mural shows Posada's skull as the central figure, holding the young Rivera's hand, next to the artist's wife, Frida Kahlo. *Catrina* is surrounded by important historical and indigenous figures and, above all, the wife and daughter of Porfirio Díaz[17]. In addition, Rivera painted her in sophisticated clothes and an extravagant hat with feathers, alluding to José Posada's *Catrina*.

Today, Catrina is closely associated with Day of the Dead celebrations through decorated sugar skulls, face painting, and dresses and/or costumes worn at festivals associated with the ancient Aztec queen of the underworld, Mictecacíhuatl (Díaz, 2020).

Then, in 1982, sculptor and painter Juan Torres Calderón[18] reproduced La Catrina in clay for the first time. Linked to this figure, the typical skeleton-shaped dolls made of wood, clay, and/or clay began to be sold, becoming one of the best-known ways of representing Catrina in Mexican popular art.

La Catrina is now a popular tourist attraction and can be found in statue form in many local shops throughout Mexico and other cities like New York [see Chapter 7.1. Day of the Dead as Place Branding], made from wood, clay, or papier-mâché. These are eloquently painted and real feathers are added to the hats (*Day of the Dead: Who Is La Catrina*?, n.d.). Mexican artists reinterpret calaveras as part of current Day of the Dead celebrations[19]. Today, skulls sometimes incorporate pop culture motifs or refer to the country's contemporary politics.

As the festivity has greatly evolved into a joyous display of art, literature, and music, *Catrina* herself has become a strong symbol for numerous Day of the Dead activities. At this time, several women painted their faces[20] like skeletons and dressed up in special clothes decorated with flowers and large feathered hats[21], evoking the famous symbolic skeleton.

La Catrina is now omnipresent and has been adopted as a worldwide icon of the Mexican spirit, reversing Posada's original goal. She overcame her political and social concepts and took her place at the forefront of Mexican culture (Coughlan, 2022).

[17] Former President of Mexico. Associated with the Mexican Revolution – 1911.
[18] Juan Torres Calderón is a portrait painter, who identifies with Fauvism and Impressionism.
[19] Figure 12. Skull Dolls. In: https://livethelittlethings.com/blog/visual-travel-guide-cdmx
[20] Figure 13. Skull make-up. In: https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2021/10/10712576/sugar-skull-makeup-day-of-dead-cultural-appropriation
[21] Figure 14. Skull Disguise. In: https://www.pinterest.com/msimsimsi/costumes/

Figure 12. Skull Dolls

Figure 13. Skull make-up

Figure 14. Skull Disguise

5.4. Appropriation of *La Catrina* in times of globalisation

A century after its creation, the Catrina icon proclaims itself as the "*excellent Mexican image of death*"; associated with Day of the Dead celebrations, particularly in metropolitan areas, Catrina now extends beyond the space-time span of the festivities. The *Catrina* has become a polysemic sign of identity, traditionalist, and thanatological in recent years.

Catrina was constantly associated as part of the post-revolutionary nationalist government's ideology, as she accentuated the idea that Mexicans enjoy death. Undoubtedly, the effect of the images of skeletons and skulls must reflect not only pre-Hispanic history but also Western and Catholic influences. This stereotype and Mexican cultural reference are now fully intertwined not only with the festival itself but also with death as a phenomenon, to make sense of a particular relationship that Mexicans have with death. Therefore, Catrina's image goes beyond the space-time of this festivity and raises countless reflections.

According to Efran Cortés Ruiz (2005), “In modern times and urban areas, the national culture of «imaginary Mexico» continues to perpetuate the myth that «the Mexicans laugh of death» because they eat sugar skulls with their names and buy skeletons in various poses”. Catrina is an excellent example of the evolution and appropriation of such a discourse, as it has now become a true nationalization not just of the picture but also of the polysemic symbol of identity, tradition, and death that spreads through various means. As a result, it is no longer merely a «nationalist ideological argument» to achieve personal-level appropriation and social use. This image became a national symbol, an important and relevant cultural aspect.

Also, in Mexico, *La Catrina* has become a «symbol of death», representing a «displacement of meaning through contiguity». Similarly, *Catrina* is inextricably related to the Day of the Dead celebration, which is why it takes on a crucial role - that of a cultural and traditional claim for the preservation of this commemoration against the "infiltration" of other cultural practises, such as Halloween [theme developed in chapter 7.2.2. The social impact- Day of the Dead versus Halloween].

It is interesting considering how this «Mexican particularism» managed to evolve in use and appropriation within the context of globalisation. In this sense, the use of ICTs, particularly the internet, opened countless possibilities for the communication and dissemination of *Catrina*'s polysemic aspects - identity, tradition, and death - leaving a wide range of options for her appropriation, as well as allowing greater breadth in the identity scope. New forms of electronic communication contribute to the formation of the public space through which, during the Day of the Dead, the dissemination of images in defence of this tradition is intensified and exalting the rejection of «foreign practices», which are presented as a “danger to the permanence of the traditional”. The image of Catrina, like any other Mexican creation, was subjected to processes of appropriation, whose objectives vary in the individual and collective areas, and transcend the nature of "national identity", as well as the time of the celebration of the Day of the Dead.

Its use in crafts, tattoos, and animation films has been confirmed more thoroughly, that is, without any modifications - regardless of its aim. In the latter case, Eugenia León lends her voice to Catrina when she sings "La Llorona" in René Castillo's (2011) animated film *Hasta los Huesos*. As a result, there is a change and development of Catrina's metaphorical pictures, showing a "free" appropriation of her. The identification components that are unique to her - the hat with feathers and flowers - were omitted in this example but used in another iconographic support, such as the parody image from the television series *Garbage Pail Kids*, in which the character Dayna the Dead is represented with these elements. This allusive transition from one picture to another is enabled by "*the condensation or displacement of the sign while maintaining the code of analogy*" (Metz, 1977). Other repercussions of metaphorical displacement include the modification of the iconic signifier by overlapping with other cultural references, such as a *Catrina* dressed in the iconic Marilyn Monroe's famed white outfit.

On the other hand, iconographic allusions to Catrina being "sexualized" and virtually "eroticized" were uncovered, which goes beyond the metaphor's role. This trait is confirmed by her various representational supports - animated films, figures - as well as her temporary embodiment through clothing or permanently through a tattoo. Another example is the advertising images of two major funeral homes in Mexico City, which use Catrina's image in their advertising during the Day of the Dead period, confirming this evolution in their representation as well as the continuity of

relating it to death as a phenomenon and its more concrete or pragmatic aspects (Torres-Ramos, 2014).

Since its conception, Catrina's image has been entwined in a continuous process of multiple appropriation and interpretation (Torres-Ramos, 2014). By being confused with death, the socio-political critique that it originally represented has now become an identification aspect of national identity. However, it is no longer the "Calavera del Montón", but its appropriation gives rise to a quasi-incarnation and finds a variety of material and virtual supports to make itself present beyond the Day of the Dead celebration, even though its introduction in indigenous communities has spread and intensified alongside elements typical of other cultures, such as Halloween. Similarly, the migratory phenomenon has enabled and continues to contribute to a profound change in social practises at the local and family levels, as well as in the community of origin and site of national or foreign permanence.

Cultural globalisation has undoubtedly created new symbolic spaces. In this sense, ICTs, particularly the Internet, have been regarded first and foremost as a support that contributes to the global dissemination and appropriation of cultural elements that extend beyond the spatiotemporal and national paintings in which they are originally inserted, allowing for the free appropriation of these elements. Catrina is also a growing emblem that reaches new generations. She has recently become a symbol of protest for the lives lost to violence and in opposition to femicide (Alvarado, 2022).

Several initiatives emerged in 2019 that combined celebrations with calls for justice for victims of disappearances and those killed in their country. Pink crosses were scattered in front of municipal courts in remembrance of women who died in the violence, and an altar with stories and candles was set up to honour victims of the "*Guerra Sucia*" in the 1990s and 1970s, which murdered hundreds.

The cemetery is no longer the only place to find altars. People visit altars to make requests, pray, and speak with the deceased. Furthermore, the offerings recognise the union of sorrow and the need for justice, which transformed the Day of the Dead from its original form (Soria-Escalante & De la Fuente-Herrera, 2020). Today, Mexicans are responding to the new conditions of violent death with the response they have always known, socialising the loss, and attempting to restore the symbolic order rather than the warped order of violence.

Mexican traditions have shaped the country into a distinct community that considers death to be a natural part of the life cycle. Mourning, affective responses, identity, and socialisation are all important components of the grieving process. The Day of the Dead exemplifies the symbolic value of mobilising signifiers through a fusion of traditional and foreign practises.

Because of the recent harsh conditions of disproportionate killings, the society is currently undergoing a new transition. Year after year, there is a twin demand for mourning and cathartic release, as well as a desire for the deceased's satisfactory release to continue the life-death cycle begun by Mesoamerican beliefs (Soria-Escalante & De la Fuente-Herrera, 2020). As a result, Mexicans continue to commemorate those who have died with joy and celebration, while sympathising with their pain.

6. The celebrations

The Day of the Dead is considered a celebration of memory and, of course, a ritual that favours memory over oblivion. This celebration takes place every year between November 1st and 2nd. It originates from a syncretism[22] of two Catholic celebrations - El Día de Todos los Santos y El Día de los Fieles Difuntos- with the diverse customs and traditions of the Mexican indigenous peoples. In other words, it is a mixture of the indigenous death cult and the Catholic religion.

The vital objetive of this celebration "es garantizar a los seres queridos, aquellos que ya no caminan más con nosotros, una bienvenida digna y un retorno material memorable" (Padilla, 2020). The celebration of the Day of the Dead corresponds to the Funeral Rites[23] and Remembrance Rites[24], "que aquellos que permiten la trascendencia y la convivencia del difunto con los vivos. Comprende el tiempo y el espacio destinados al luto y las conmemoraciones en las que se inmiscuya al difunto" (Mendonza, 2006). Thus, by honouring the dead, we are helping to satisfy the needs of the living for transcendence.

In general, fifteen days before the expected party, an irregular movement is observed in the streets and inside the houses. On these dates, in the main squares, it is customary for the merchants to set up their booths or stores for the sale of the main constituent elements of this celebration: sweets, candles, flowers, and toys (Ríos et al. p.90).

It is a joyful party, inviting friends and relatives to make a path from their homes to the cemeteries. "*The «high-life» visited the cemeteries in the morning, and the lower town, that is, the «low-life» visited them in the afternoon*" (Ríos et al. pp.91-95).

[22] Syncretism: 1. Combination of different theories, attitudes, or opinions. 2. Philosophical system that tries to reconcile different doctrines. In: https://dle.rae.es/sincretismo

[23] Funeral rites: they are carried out from his death until the moment of taking him to the place destined for his body-corpse. In: https://www.cultura.gob.mx/turismocultural/publi/Cuadernos_19_num/cuaderno16.pdf (p. 29)

[24] Remembrance rites: they are those that allow the transcendence and coexistence of the deceased with the living. In: https://www.cultura.gob.mx/turismocultural/publi/Cuadernos_19_num/cuaderno16.pdf (p.29)

In various Mexican homes, families open the doors of their houses to anyone who wants to see the altars[25]. Usually, visitors are offered the traditional *pan de muerte* and *atole* (a typical drink made from corn). In addition, it is customary to dine in front of the altar. In this way, souls are invited to share a moment, and a connection is created between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

When there is entertainment, in the Main Plaza, the rest of the day and part of the night is spent attending small comedy shows. At half past midnight, the party ends, and the dead come out of their graves and cry for the torment they have gone through and for the noise that kept them awake all day.

Of equal importance, after the usual cultural-religious traditions, every year, on the *Paseo de la Reforma de la Ciudad de México*, the famous parades take place: *el Desfile Internacional de Muertos y el Gran Desfile de* Día de Muertos. The parades are characterized by being a modern adaptation and conjunction of all the traditions lived in this celebration (Travesías, 2019) - women dressed up and made up as *Catrinas*, flowers, bright colours, music, dance, and floats-. As the commemoration indicates, it is a happy way of joking and honouring the deceased animatedly (Luviano, 2019). The parade has become a true tourist attraction for the Mexican capital. For example, in 2019, it attracted 2.5 million people (Travesías, 2019).

The Day of the Dead has been commercialised internally and externally. However, the truth is that this festival has never had unbreakable rules, to which new traditions driven by globalization are added from time to time.

First, the conception of death that Mexicans currently have, in which they accept it as an inevitable consequence that motivates them to enjoy it even more before it reaches them, having in its origin a native cosmovision. Although the Day of the Dead celebration, as we know it today, is different from that celebrated by pre-Hispanic peoples, they do have similarities. Offerings, as we have already seen in chapter 4.2., have been made since pre-Hispanic times. In the case of the Mexicas, the predominant civilization when the Spaniards arrived, food and water were offered to the dead on their long journey to Mictlán, the underworld, which would last four years.

For the Mexicas, the feasts of the dead lasted two days. The first of these two celebrations, that is, the first twenty days, received the name of Miccailhuitzintli (festival of the small dead), and the second, the last twenty days, received the name of Huey Miccailhuitzintli (festival of the great dead). These celebrations and the current Day of the Dead are different, yet they allow us to see

[25] People, on the altars, place photographs of their deceased loved ones along with their favourite food and drink.

certain parallels that help us to understand the origin of many of the traditions that are part of this celebration today.

Chapter IV. The globalisation impact and its consequences

7. Evolution of importance at an economic, cultural, and tourist level

The celebration has been gradually undergoing a significant evolution. In three centuries, the altars and offerings were changing, enriching, and adapting to the customs of the different Indigenous peoples of Mexico.

a) Pre-Hispanic times

Since its origin, the Day of the Dead has always had significant importance beyond the religious part. It is a fact that, to this day, moves the culture, economy, and tourism in Mexico. Since pre-colonial times, the *Mexicas* invested and enjoyed items to enrich their offerings to the dead.

According to Fray Bernardino de Sahagún[26], a frantic and overwhelming financial activity could be observed during the festivities in the Tenochtitlán[27] market (Sandoval, 2021). There was no distinction between commercial and religious activity in this case, so the celebrations supported the market and vice versa.

b) Colonial era

The Day of the Dead tradition it has arrived in Mexico with the Spanish conquerors in the 16th century, who practiced a mediaeval Christian European rite that consisted of laying a table with flowers and food to feed those who had previously departed. At that time, mediaeval Spain was extremely poor and plagued by several plagues, making mortality a constant concern. As a result, the altars of the dead, complete with flowers and food, that the Spaniards carried to New Spain began to be associated with religion among pre-Hispanic peoples, a cult that was already adequately syncretic.

As a result, the colonisers gradually imported the altar they built for their dead to replace the harvest festivities that the Mexicas already held in October and November. “And, over time, elements typical of the region were added to it, such as the cempasuchil flower, which had nothing to do with the dead, but was a flower dedicated to the god of war, Huitzilopochtli,” as Noemí

[26] Bernardino de Sahagún (1499 – February 5, 1590) was a Franciscan missionary. He is the author of works in Nahuatl and Spanish, considered valuable for the reconstruction of the history of Mexico before the arrival of the Spanish settlers.
[27] Current Mexico City

Cortés Cruz Cortés explains (Día de Muertos, *Una Tradición Muy Viva, 2019*). As a result of the widespread process of evangelization in pre-Hispanic Mexico, as well as other regions of the world, a bit was taken from native peoples' traditions and blended with the traditions brought by Christian missionaries.

Since the Spanish colonizers began to have contact with the Mexican peoples and the evangelization process began, the Catholic religion also emphasized commercial activity concerning this celebration. That is, according to Catholic belief, since the 16th and 17th centuries, most souls went to purgatory after death. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the living to help alleviate the suffering of the souls in purgatory to help them reach heaven (Sandoval, 2021).

In fact, in Mexico, it meant that recently converted Spanish settlers and Indigenous Catholics were tasked with buying candles directly from the church and other types of religious items that could be used in offerings to souls (Sandoval, 2021). Also, during the Day of the Dead celebrations, they could ask the local priest to preach special prayers for the dead, paying a symbolic fee[28].

As this celebration has become so popular in Mexico, commercial activity has not stopped growing. According to anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz[29], in the 1700s, the celebration moved to the largest annual market in Mexico City (Sandoval, 2021). In general, Mexican markets and vendors sold typical foods and drinks and famous objects such as candles, toys, and religious items.

c) From the Revolution to the present days

Changes increased in independent Mexico, according to Noem Cortés, when more indigenous components began to be included because of the Reform Laws, which, among other clauses, separated the Church from the State, nationalised ecclesiastical assets, and declared freedom of worship. What we now call the altar has its origins in all the 19th alterations, since with the introduction of the Reform Laws, many Indigenous people were allowed to add features, however discreetly.

However, this freedom took over a century to become a celebrated event. This liberty was only attained after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 when a distinct nationalism emerged: "Indigenous

[28] A practice that continued throughout the 20th century.
[29] Claudio Lomnitz (Santiago de Chile, 1957) is a Chilean Mexican writer, social anthropologist, and professor, professor at Columbia University.

customs began to be retaken, that is when regional and Indigenous traditions began to emerge as national elements".

Increased commercial activity also provided an opportunity for musicians and other artists to submit their pieces for a small fee. The Day of the Dead began to have religious and economic significance.

d) Present days

After an arduous liberation struggle and subsequent nation-building process during the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century in Mexico was stormy. The revolutionary spirit, which lasted several years, set the stage for the government to exploit the desire to create a country as its driving force and rhetoric. Because it was tied to the occupied past, it urgently needed components for its formation that would cement a national, legitimate, communal identity and an identity separate from any Hispanic ancestry. Consequently, these administrations resurrected pre-Hispanic historical rites to place these traditions at the national level as emblems of collective and national identification. The position of the Day of the Dead in this nationalist drive was expressively crucial since, even though it had been celebrated for millennia, it had been meant as a customary ritual kept in the private-familial or local domain. In other words, before the twentieth-century nationalist administrations, death celebrations did not have a major role in the common sphere.

And although this ancient custom already existed, accompanied by elements that defined it, it was only when nationalist governments, such as that of President Lázaro Cárdenas, began to exalt popular customs, that this day became part of the collective Mexican discourse of national history. Similarly, the 1970s were important for the national and international recognition of the Day of the Dead, as it was at this time that the celebration began to gain traction on political agendas. However, both nationalist and indigenous motivations deny that the Day of the Dead is a celebration of undeniable cultural diversity that not only speaks of the various indigenous ethnic groups but is also the result of the cultural synthesis of the ancient indigenous world with the Hispanic world.

Like any living tradition, the Day of the Dead celebration continues to evolve, and its popularity expanded not only to the country's metropolitan regions, where the festivities were more low-key, but even beyond Mexican boundaries. Currently, because of globalization, the Mexican party has become a world party and a cultural trademark of Mexico. According to anthropologists Stanley Brandes and Ruth Hellier-Tinoco, Mexico began, in the 20th century, to market the Day of the Dead to the world (Sandoval, 2021).

The Mexican tourism industry itself has initiated a series of initiatives to promote vacations to foreigners as an authentic Mexican experience. For example, the Mexican festival "*Venta"* on the virgin island of *Janitzio*, in Michoacán, Mexico, has turned a small community ceremony into a spectacle with more than 100,000 visitors a year (Sandoval, 2021).

In addition to the tourist part, there is a commercialisation of this festivity, from the moment that people begin to bring typical elements of the Day of the Dead to Halloween. Secondly, as argued by Miriam Manrique, "Culture is dynamic and is impregnated with permanence and change. I think Halloween sometimes gets sucked into our traditions". She adds that on many occasions "it is detrimental to culture because it represents interests that trivialize and commercialise these celebrations"[30] (Castillo, 2021). Due to widespread migration that has separated several families from cemeteries and ancestral tombs, Day of the Dead celebrations have evolved. The festival has gained significant recognition in the United States, primarily for its growing Mexican population and media attention. US cities hold major events and festivals each year to celebrate and honour the Day of the Dead traditions. However, the reception of this commercialisation has been generating controversy in some Mexican communities, because, although not always intended to be solemn, the festivities are deeply personal and rooted in the family history of a historical tradition with thousands of years. This festivity is a celebration of the unique and resilient life for all communities in Mexico, as well as the Mexican diaspora.

This crossing of influences is not about closing off modernity but understanding diversity and recognizing identity as an extensive cultural framework (Castillo, 2021). It is important to look at the native peoples of a mystical past and begin to assume that their cultures, from a humble and ethical perspective, are part of Mexico's complex and enormous reality, which goes beyond the commercial or tourist.

According to Cruz Cortes (*apud UN, 2019*), the festival has been going through a complex transformation that responds to a media effect. The centuries-old story of the Day of the Dead is constantly being reinterpreted, with the addition of new elements. Like languages, beliefs, and traditions, the celebration of the Day of the Dead changes relentlessly. It is a living tradition (Día de Muertos, *Una Tradición Muy Viva*, 2019).

[30] https://blog.seccionamarilla.com.mx/importancia-del-dia-de-muertos/

8. Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO)

Intangible cultural heritage or "*living heritage*" refers to the practices, expressions, knowledge, or techniques that are transmitted from generation to generation within a community. Intangible heritage provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity: It fosters creative and social well-being, helps with environmental and social management, and creates economic wealth.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage aims to protect this fragile heritage. It also seeks to ensure visibility and optimize the potential for sustainable growth.

With effect, on November 7th, 2003[31], the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) decided to include the Day of the Dead in the Representative List of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, qualifying it as a traditional integrating, representative, and community expression[32] (UNESCO - The Indigenous Festivals Dedicated to the Dead, 2019).

According to UNESCO:

> Las fiestas indígenas dedicadas a los muertos están altamente arraigadas en la vida cultural de los pueblos indígenas de México. Esta fusión entre ritos religiosos prehispánicos y fiestas católicas permite el acercamiento de dos universos, el de las creencias indígenas y el de una visión del mundo introducida por los europeos en el siglo XVI" (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos Mexicanos, n.d.*).

The celebration provides people with a space for the reproduction of different expressions: symbolic architecture, plastic works, craft, and ceremonial objects. It is a perfect mix of many traditions, so it is necessary to protect them so that they are not forgotten over time. Thanks to this initiative, UNESCO has managed to create an instrument to support multiple cultural initiatives to establish mechanisms for the protection and preservation of tangible heritage.

Next, this celebration has a big role in Mexican culture and society, as well as being a symbol of the cultural value of the country. It should be noted that this lively tradition continues to change, and its popularity has not only spread to the urban areas of the country, where the festivities were more discreet but has also transcended the Mexican borders.

[31] Registered in 2008; Originally proclaimed in 2003 as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In https://ich.unesco.org/es/RL/las-fiestas-indgenas-dedicadas-a-los-muertos-00054

[32] 2. Show the human and cultural values of a certain period of History (...) 3. Give testimony of a cultural tradition of some existing or already disappeared civilization. 6. That it is associated with some tradition that is still alive, that represents some belief (...). In: https://patrimoniosdelahumanidad.com/2013/10/15/que-requisitos-se-deben-cumplir-para-ser-declarado-patrimonios/

9. The Day of the Dead Facing Globalization

The next chapter tries to discuss the modifications that the celebration has undergone and continues to undergo in the face of globalisation, commenting on the changes and implications both inside and outside of Mexico. Furthermore, as a result of the globalisation process, this event and its characteristic components have been commercialised, as shown in the construction of Mexico City's brand image, or place/city branding.

Similarly, the economic and social effects of the globalisation process will be discussed, highlighting the good and bad elements as well as the repercussions. On the economic dimension, I will highlight the festival's weight and economic significance. On the social front, I'll contrast the social components of two important holidays, Day of the Dead and Halloween, focusing on their contrasts and how they're truly experienced. Finally, I will discuss the repercussions of globalisation, including whether it may lead to a loss of authenticity in ancestral traditions and how local inhabitants see this transformation.

9.1. Day of the Dead as Place Branding

The Day of the Dead has naturally influenced many other cultures and festivals in other countries. Today it is celebrated not only in Mexico but also in several American cities and countries such as Spain, the Philippines, Brazil, and Guatemala. For example, in New York, every year a tribute is paid to this holiday due to the strong presence of Mexican immigrants, so it is possible to see *ofrendas* in the streets of New York at the Museum of Natural History, on 2nd November, promotes a series of artistic activities as well as exhibitions associated with the theme of the Day of the Dead (Fig.15).

Figure 15. Day of the Dead celebration Rockefeller Center, USA

Furthermore, in the context of global capitalism, this celebration is often transformed by the media and the government into a pure spectacle and a tourist product. Many ancestral cultural goods are threatened by the times in which we live since the main concern is to promote tourism and sell Mexican folklore to the outside world. There is, therefore, a homogenisation and trivialisation of the true symbolic meaning of this celebration, which has been transformed into an entertainment and leisure product (Mendoza, 2021).

In addition to the nomination of the Day of the Dead as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, in recent years, it has transcended borders, becoming a cultural phenomenon fuelled by films such as Pixar's *Coco* (2017)[33], which grossed more than 800 million dollars worldwide (Linares, 2022). Coco concentrates upon the Day of the Dead tradition and reflects Mexican customs on this day.

The Day of the Dead was also prominent in the memorable opening scene of the James Bond film *007: Spectre*, in which actor Daniel Craig seduces Catrina - the female skeleton - while running, jumping, shooting, and blowing up a building in the Historic Centre of Mexico City during the Day of the Dead parade. Curiously, the International Day of the Dead Parade was driven by the film *007: Spectre*, shot in 2015 in Mexico City (Noticias Depor, 2021). It's a case of reality imitating fiction because this parade would never have taken place without the film[34] (Linares, 2022). To capitalise on the film's success, the government, together with the Federal Government's Ministry of Tourism, announced that, from 2016, the International Day of the Dead parade would be incorporated into the activities associated with this holiday. The argument used was "after the James Bond film, tourists want to come and see it and they won't find it". The Mexican government made it their own and the people appropriated it and made it their own (Meneses, 2018). According to the Secretary of Tourism of the Government of Mexico, Miguel Torruco Marqués, in 2022, the festivities brought in 1.8 billion dollars. Compared to the same period in 2019, there was a 95% recovery (Secretaría de Turismo, 2019).

Furthermore, it is important to mention that these popular culture productions have given even more character to the ancient celebration of the Day of the Dead. The expressions of popular culture not only show the world the essence of the celebration but also turn it into a commercial

Figure 15 In: https://secretnyc.co/rockefeller-center-day-of-the-dead/

[33] *Coco* concentrates on the Day of the Dead tradition and reflects Mexican rituals of this day, with the Cempaschil flower playing a vital part since, according to old legends, this flower bridges the two realms and leads the dead. Furthermore, the family is important since the deceased can only visit Earth if their loved ones remember them and include their images in the offering. It emphasises the necessity of having a cohesive family that adheres to its cultural heritage. *Coco* is a moving narrative about the value of family, community, a sense of belonging, tradition, and recollection.

[34] Since 2016, the parade has been held every year. In 2021 more than 400,000 people took part in the parade. In: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/what-is-dia-de-los-muertos-day-of-dead-rcna54794

product (a circumstance that is directly exploited by the different political agendas to boost tourism). This tradition, therefore, translates into better economic conditions, as there is a greater monetary investment in Mexican society and the strengthening of community ties with a view to social development. However, although many consider this economic power to be a bad phase in the history of the Day of the Dead, contemporaneity does not imply the deterioration of the celebration, but rather the turning of a cycle. This is because, even when the Day of the Dead becomes commercialised, it remains a true mark of cultural identity, since its evolution parallels national history.

Public celebrations of the Day of the Dead in Mexico and other parts of Latin America are increasingly under the influence of Hollywood. According to anthropologist Tomás Pérez Suárez, the films that popularise the festivities are altering indigenous traditions that date back 3,000 years, so such changes can "confuse" the holiday so much that future generations may not be sufficiently familiar with its roots. The popularity of both films has led to greater commercialisation of the celebration, as an official route of the picturesque celebrations as cultural food for tourists.

However, in the opinion of researcher Ana María Salazar (Mendoza, 2021), the commercial exploitation of the Day of the Dead stands in stark contrast to the indigenous cosmovision. In other words, as soon as attempts are made to commercialise this celebration, the indigenous symbolism begins to dissipate - "According to this global mercantile reason, everything can be commercialised, which fosters processes that stereotype and homogenise cultural goods to mass-produce and commercialise them." (Mendoza, 2021). As a result, the cult is gradually changing; the traditions remain, but nowadays people, especially young people, are unaware of the true meaning of this festival; they celebrate it because it has become a routine tradition.

The Day of the Dead has never been a static rite because it has the meaning that everyone wants to give it - from the spiritual to the festive - but above all, it challenges the status quo. The celebration is no longer just a legendary event, but a form of self-recognition and cultural reaffirmation. The passage of time has given it a dynamic and lively spirit, so its centuries-old history has given rise to a long-standing "cult" and a cultural reconciliation that constitutes Mexico's cultural identity.

Today, the Day of the Dead continues to change thanks to the impact of globalisation, reinforced by the capitalist economic model. Today, globalisation, investment, marketing, and consumption have appropriated the feast of the dead.

9.2 The impact of globalisation - the party in and out of Mexico

The next section discusses the economic and social impacts of the festivities, as well as the consequences of their commercialisation. In this way, it will be possible to observe the direct positive and negative repercussions that the economic impact, for example, has on the lives of Mexicans. In addition, in terms of social impact, it was possible to compare two celebrations - The Day of the Dead and Halloween - to understand how different they are, despite the common general idea. Finally, and in general, I will address the direct consequences and how this is reflected in the loss of authenticity of the celebration.

9.2.1. The economic impact

According to the World Tourism Organisation, Mexico is one of the most visited nations in Latin America, owing to its cultural and natural components designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In addition, it is the eighth country with the most elements registered on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, with 35 elements inscribed (López Morales, 2021).

Since 2003, UNESCO has designated the Day of the Dead as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. According to Ana Mara Salazar, a researcher at UNAM's Institute of Anthropological Research (IIA), the Anthropology of Death has contributed to this by allowing us to comprehend its worth as an «exceptional expression» of intangible customs (Mendoza, 2021). In this sense, UNESCO plays the duty of teaching global society about who Mexicans are as a group and helps to sustain the collective memory of societies, given that the festivities portray the community's religious and civic iconography. As a result, communal life is reinforced, as is cultural identity and local innovation (Mendoza, 2021).

The Day of the Dead reached other countries, in 2018, as part of the actions of the Consejo de Promoción Turistica de México (CPTM) and the Ministry of Tourism, so that more people could learn about this holiday, through the Corazón de México[35] project. This initiative allows for this holiday to be celebrated in cities in North America and Europe. In this sense, iconic sites, and monuments such as Central Park in New York, the CN Tower in Toronto, the Victoria Column in Berlin, and, lastly, the Eiffel Tower in Paris have included Mexican personalities such as El Charro, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera. Furthermore, on the second and third of November, New York City integrated the celebration within the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). The museum, in collaboration with the state of Oaxaca, hosted altars dedicated to extinct species

[35] https://www.sectur.gob.mx/programas/programas-regionales/programa-en-el-corazon-de-mexico/

of animals, as well as an arts and crafts market, dances, music, and craft demonstrations, all of which made it possible to celebrate the Day of the Dead in this iconic New York cultural institution (Europa Press, 2018).

This is one of the country's largest festivals, with thousands of Mexicans preparing to take part in this vivid custom. Around 9 out of 10, Mexicans celebrate the Day of the Dead, but they are not the only ones who participate in the "encounter" between the dead and the living, bringing with them a significant economic benefit (Ldelvalle, 2019).

According to Ministry of Tourism data, the Day of the Dead celebration in Mexico has an average economic impact of 175 million euros on the country's tourism industry, with approximately 7.5 million foreign tourists attending each year (*La Celebración Del Dá de Muertos Dejará 175 Millones de Impacto En México, 2018*). According to the National Chamber of Commerce, Services, and Tourism of Mexico City (CANACO), the Day of the Dead represented an economic spill of nearly 1900 million pesos in 2019, before the pandemic, resulting in national hotel occupancy of 64% in October and 82% in November.

Furthermore, these days, consumption per person averages 465 pesos, leaving a total of more than 1.3 billion pesos for Mexico's micro, mid, and medium-sized companies. Flowers, dead bread, costumes, sweets, and decorations saw up to a 100% spike in sales, while grocery shops had a 40% boost in sales in Mexico City. According to Humberto Lozano Aviles, president of CANACO, the industries that gained the most from this festival were hotel services, restaurants, fancy dress stores, bakery shops, and florists.

Using example, according to Torruco Márques, secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, revenue by lodging concept was 3,751 million pesos, with a national hotel occupancy rate of 58.3%, which is 1.4% more than the same period in 2022, when occupancy during these festivities was 56.9%. The 2019 International Parade of the Dead is expected to create a hotel occupancy rate of 87.5 percent in Mexico City. In addition, almost two million people watched the procession through the city streets, producing almost 30 million euros in economic benefits for the city (Secretaría de Turismo, 2019).

Figure 16. Desfile do Dia Internacional dos Mortos 2019.

Ana Mara Salazar, on the other hand, cautioned that in the context of global capitalism, commemorations of the deceased are being turned into spectacles by the media or tourist merchandise by governments. "At the moment, many ancestral cultural goods are under serious threat," she remarked. Homogenising their cultural output, trivialising their symbolic value, and transforming them into spectacles and leisure goods*"* (Mendoza, 2021). The author has observed that when death is folklorised and mediatised as a spectacle, it is primarily used for monetary gain, as was the case with the films mentioned above – *007: Spectre* and *Coco* - as well as the International Day of the Dead Parade, which arose because of successful film production.

In the case of the Day of the Dead event, Mexico experiences the consequences of an uncontrollable influx of tourists: "*[…] como ya observamos antes, en las últimas décadas del siglo XX ésta y otras fiestas y tradiciones son utilizadas en muchos casos por un turismo desmedido, cuya característica principal es la explotación comercial alejada de toda sustentabilidad cultural o natural, que actualmente pone en grave riesgo la histórica conmemoración, visiblemente degradada en los últimos años por los festejos triviales masivos y por la comercialización excesiva de los espacios públicos*" (Coordinación Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural y Turismo, 2006, pp. 127-128).

Overtourism, or the presence of an excessive number of visitors in a place that does not respect local citizens or local culture, has become a reality in Mexico throughout the years. Tourism inspired by popular culture is a current trend. People pick a place based on social media, influencers, television shows, and films, according to this sort of tourism.

The escape and uneasiness of the inhabitants are one of the primary repercussions. Complaints focus on the departure of small companies, which have been replaced with tourist stores, and the insecurity of their communities. Another effect is the exodus of citizens from communities that

have become tourist traps, losing their character. The more visitors a site gets, the less authentic it becomes. Overtourism produces a cultural split due to an increase in tourists, pollution, local costs, and the exodus of natives from the location. Commercial usage contrasts with the indigenous worldview, in which there is continuity and strength in the relationships between the living and the dead, giving rise to a multiplicity of pre-Hispanic cultural manifestations.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has dedicated an entire report to overtourism on developing the essential instruments to avoid the negative effects of tourism, both natural cultural, and social, to foster more responsible, ecological, and sustainable tourism (Framba, 2020). The Sustainable Tourism Programme, or Mexico Renace Sostenible, was created in response to observations from the World Tourism Organisation and aims to transform tourism into a tool for social well-being and harmony with nature through various projects, strategies, and programmes, such as SECTUR, PROFEPA and the Mexican Hotel and Motel Association signing the "Tourism Environmental Quality" Programme. Furthermore, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on September 25th, 2015. Its key goals are to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and provide equality and prosperity for everyone, and for the first time, businesses can play a front-line role in bringing this new development agenda to fruition. "Leave no one, no place, behind" (Secretaría de Turismo, 2021).

This comprehensive and collaborative plan was created with the primary participants in mind: the government, local tourist service providers, and businesses that provide value for the sustainable tourism chain. The goal is for Mexican tourist locations to serve as models for sustainable tourism by integrating ecosystem services to build sustainable consumption and production value chains, encouraging local engagement, socio-environmental commitment, and biodiversity conservation.

Moreover, a balance must be struck between tourist visits and the preservation of the community in which they are located. For all these reasons, the tourist model must consider the need to protect and conserve the territory's creative legacy, organize actions that do not interfere with the upkeep of these places, and control the activities that take place there or in the surrounding environment.

9.2.2. The social impact - Day of the Dead versus Halloween

The Day of the Dead has been honoured in Mexico consistently since colonial times and appears to be apolitical at first appearance. Though it is a social event in which families remember and honour their dead relatives, in recent decades, the celebration has taken on a political overtone, tying it to Mexico and the Mexican national identity.

Indeed, the Day of the Dead has contributed to the creation of a worldview in which Mexico is distinct, culturally distinct, and, most of all, distinct from the two powers that previously governed it - Spain and the United States. This is why the Mexican reaction to Halloween and the Day of the Dead, which have evolved to represent culturally separate rituals, is so significant (Brandes, 2000).

Halloween and the Day of the Dead share certain parallels, but they are two separate traditions with unconnected roots. Halloween originated with the Celts of Ireland, who celebrated Samhain on October 31st. It is one of the most important celebrations, signalling the start of the new year and the cold season while also thanking the gods for the harvest's success. Furthermore, the Celts thought that on that day, the dead came to see the living to select those who would die the next year. People dressed up in horrible costumes and left sweets in front of their houses to frighten these spirits away.

The name "Halloween" originated during the 9th century Christianization. The church commemorates All Saints' Day on November 1st, therefore the night before All Hallow's Eve evolved into Halloween as we know it today. When the Irish came to the United States in the nineteenth century, they carried their customs with them and expanded and popularised them.

However, the scenario is vastly different on the Day of the Dead. The Day of the Dead, as a holiday that represents the history and culture of the Mexican people and whose origins date back to the region's pre-Columbian cultures, plays an important part in the lives of the residents. The ceremonies and gifts symbolise centuries of Mexican people's customs and practises that have been anchored and passed down from generation to generation, earning it a position on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Both the Day of the Dead and Halloween have grown in popularity in recent years, owing in part to film and literature, but also to travellers seeking unique experiences. This flood of history and culture has increased to visitors eager to learn more about both. In Spain, for example, the 1st of November is celebrated as All Saints' Day, which is dedicated to venerating and visiting the dead; however, for some time now, Halloween has established itself as a festival, causing a massive influx of people, particularly young people, who take to the streets in masks on the night of the 31st of October; this influx has also led to places such as schools and nurseries dedicating these days to recreating this celebration in their unique style.

Halloween and the Day of the Dead share certain similarities, however, Halloween is a pagan celebration with roots in Ireland and Scotland that is largely observed in the United States, whereas the Day of the Dead is a Catholic feast in Mexico that is based on Aztec culture. Although both celebrations entail dressing up as fantastical animals and having a good time with your friends, there are some significant distinctions.

People in Europe dress up and knock on doors, begging for money or food. In Mexico, food and drink are left on the graves of dead loved ones. Mexican costumes are frequently filled with significance and symbolism, but Halloween costumes are inspired by people's desire to have fun. While Halloween is only celebrated on one day, October 31st, the Day of the Dead is a multi-day holiday that begins on October 31st and ends on November 2nd.

Many nations have their unique traditions for Halloween, such as lighting bonfires, dressing up in costumes, trick-or-treating, carving pumpkins, and having large parties. The Day of the Dead, on the other hand, is fundamentally Mexican, and it is customary to gather with family to welcome the souls of relatives, as well as cook dishes for the dead and hang a photograph of the deceased loved one so that they can pass on to the land of the living.

Another significant distinction is the various festival emblems. Skulls, skeletons, and the traditional offering of pictures, flowers, and candles are the principal emblems of the Day of the Dead. Scary objects associated with Halloween include spiders, bats, black cats, ghosts, skeletons, witches, and zombies. Both celebrations feature ornate cuisine, décor, visual effects, and disguises. People of all ages enjoy dressing up, getting their faces painted, and participating in parades and festivals. The Day of the Dead offering should be vibrant, cheery, and welcoming for the spirits to feel at ease. Finding frightening or goofy costumes and decorating the house with eerie décor is what Halloween is all about.

It is therefore worth noting that the comparison between Halloween and the Day of the Dead shows that these two celebrations are fundamentally distinct, despite certain formal similarities. Both allow for the sharing of tales, the honouring of the deceased, the telling of stories, the playing of music, and the celebration of the lives of those who are no longer with us.

In short, as argued by Guillermo Meneses, Halloween is another autumn holiday that was brought to the United States from Europe and has spread to Mexico not only across the border, but also through indigenous communities; children dress up in Halloween masks for the feasts of the dead, but these masks are used in Day of the Dead rituals. This is an example of globalisation, mestizaje, acculturation, and transculturation (*Los Festejos Del Dia De Muertos En Un Mundo Globalizado, 2018*).

9.2.3 Consequences of globalisation - loss of authenticity?

This form of intangible legacy appears to be a readily commercialised feature, with small, medium, and big businesses seeing it as a chance to profit from. This sort of event supports not only stores or specialty businesses but also the catering industry.

For example, in the case of Halloween, due to its global growth, it has become holiday-oriented mostly on the selling of sweets, costumes, and decorations. It is a celebration that helps commerce greatly, resulting in large sales of things at historic levels: "*Los fabricantes de dulces tienen el 8% de sus ventas durante esta festividad […] la decoración se lleva un presupuesto de casi 1.500 millones de dólares*." (López Rojas, 2020). In terms of the Day of the Dead, mass tourism is endangering the festival's original meaning and characteristics, leading it to drift into the background and jeopardising what Mexican culture has conserved for centuries. An example of this situation is the state of Michoacán, where:

> E*s evidente la transformación y degradación de esta práctica prehispánica que hoy se encuentra al límite de su sustentabilidad como patrimonio cultural intangible de Michoacán, no por la pérdida o alteración de la tradición en sí misma, sino por las repercusiones que se generan en las poblaciones y en los diversos inmuebles y espacios urbanos monumentales que sostienen muchas funciones vinculadas con su promoción turística […] Los visitantes, de manera poco consciente, contribuyen a la alteración de ese patrimonio, el cual con el paso de las generaciones se puede convertir en una remembranza folclórica y sin autenticidad que no motive el regreso de los turistas culturales.*" (*Coordinación Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural y Turismo, 2006*).

Although the Day of the Dead festival already attracted many tourists, the premieres of the movie increased the number of visitors and therefore allowed people to understand, discover more, and be sensitised to this centuries-old practise[36].

The Day of the Dead has become so popular that it is now a celebration that is being harmed by the invasion of tourists and the excessive commerce of tourist items. Many sociologists are concerned that with this massification, the celebration will lose its authenticity and harm small local artisans, who will be overshadowed by shops selling souvenirs and tourist products that have nothing to do with true local craftsmanship. Both celebrations have become easily marketable products, with the goal of maximising profit and recognition while losing sight of their true meaning; especially Halloween, where sometimes its very survival becomes a competition to see who has the best decorations at home or who can create the most original costume. Surprisingly, the high clergy in the northern states prohibited Halloween celebrations in 1996 because the secular and commercial nature of the holiday posed a direct danger to the purity and very life of the Day of the Dead.

[36] The success of the film was such that the government itself decided to create two similar routes showing not only the most special places in the country but also those on which many of the scenes in the film were based.

As we have seen, in chapter 3.2. Artistic Humour on the Day of the Dead, through the opinion of Frain Ajofrin, for example, the Day of the Dead has, for some years now, served economic interests and can be seen as a backdrop to the festivities. Indeed, even in the most sacred part of the festival, the Day of the Dead began to incorporate a degree of commercialism; the special masses in honour of the souls of the dead originally had an economic component, as it was customary to give part of the offering to the priest as payment for the masses.

In contrast to the Day of the Dead, Halloween, according to cultural nationalists, is a hugely commercialised and vulgar event. They feel that bringing alien ingredients into an ancient and sacred ceremony taints the Day of the Dead. Celebrations with many similarities have become symbols for US-Mexico relations. Mexicans who are resentful of the United States' rising influence in their economy and culture respond by focusing their attention on a single and defined occasion, Halloween. For them, Halloween's success reflects Mexico's failure, even though the Day of the Dead has become a significant feature of Halloween celebrations in the United States (Brandes, 1998).

However, we cannot simply blame the merging of these two fall festivals for the loss of authenticity of the Day of the Dead. There has been a growing worry in recent years that the holiday is becoming increasingly commercialised.

The evidence is everywhere, not only in Mexico itself but also internationally: Target supermarket aisles are lined with cheap Day of the Dead crafts during October and November; Halloween shops sell Day of the Dead costumes; major sports brands like Nike[37] purposely manufacture trainers for the Day of the Dead (Fig.17); the states of California and Arizona[38] sell Day of the Dead lottery tickets; the Walt Disney Company[39] tried to patent the phrase "Día de los Muertos" as a trademark before the release of the film *Coco* (2017).[40]

[37] https://www.nicekicks.com/nike-dia-de-los-muertos-collection-2021-release-date/
[38] https://arizonalottely.com/scratchers/1289-celebrando-dia-de-los-muertos/
[39] https://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/10/us/disney-trademark-day-dead/index.html
[40] Disney had hoped to secure the rights to the "Day of the Dead" title and themed merchandise, but the reaction from the Latino community was very negative, sparking controversy on social media. Many tweets included demonstrations that "culture is not for sale".

Figure 17. An example of Nike's 2021 Day of the Dead collection, whose theme is centred on "Siempre Família".

Matheus Sandoval (2021), Professor of Culture and Performance at Arizona State University, spoke with a grandmother who was building her Day of the Dead offering, and she shared with the professor that she had tried for several years to get her grandchildren to help her erect the altar to her ancestors, but to no avail. However, it wasn't until they saw the movie *Coco* and spotted sugar skulls on sale at Target that they became interested in the holiday.

Commercialisation has altered the Day of the Dead, which may be interpreted both positively and negatively. On the one hand, the positive aspect of commercialisation is reflected in the fact that the incorporation of the festival into commercial and tourist products allows new generations to take pride in and learn about their culture, but also allows it to never disappear because the celebrations aimed at tourists are constantly reused. On the other side, the negative aspect of commercialisation is the loss of authenticity, because the ancestral, syncretic, and traditional festivals that we are familiar with have been slipping away because of globalisation; commerce; the merger of traits from other holidays, and mass tourism. Festivals and customs have been forcefully absorbed and pushed into state tourism strategies, creating an unsettling dichotomy as a cultural and tourist resource. Indeed, traditional local festivals are promoted in staging for visitors in which the authenticity of a custom is turned into a series of events to meet tourist needs.

The tension and duality created by tourism based on the unrestricted economic exploitation of physical and intangible assets jeopardises historical remembrance. The transformation and degradation of this pre-Hispanic practise are obvious, and it is now nearing the end of its viability, not because of the loss or alteration of the tradition itself, but because of the repercussions that are being generated in the localities and in the various monumental buildings and urban spaces that support many functions related to its tourist promotion.

The concept of loss of authenticity has become a concern that certain academicians and sociologists have argued in recent years, as it has become a reality of this city and, more especially, of this celebration. Indeed, globalisation and marketing have a direct and powerful influence on the event, forcing it to alter (for the better or the worst). However, there is a duality here, since these transitions can be good because they follow the growth of civilization in space-time, but they can also be harmful because there is a greater detachment from ancestral origins. As a result, the government and the local authorities have a responsibility to balance these concerns so that there are no extremes, and that ancestry may be balanced.

Conclusion

The research presented was aimed at theoretically and empirically deepening the problem of the iconographic evolution of the Day of the Dead and how it is used as place branding for Mexico City. In the seven chapters, each with its specificity, the Mesoamerican elements such as the legend, the origin, and the importance of the Spanish influence were emphasised, and the typical iconographic elements were presented from their origin to their current function, the evolution of their importance at an economic, cultural and tourist level, reflecting on the impacts, transformations, and direct and gradual consequences.

At this point, by way of conclusion, it is useful to emphasise that the considerations of this thesis are intended to contribute to further studies. To this end, it is crucial to draw some conclusions which, although they give a global and integrated perspective of the work carried out, cannot be taken as absolute truths.

One of the defining aspects of this work was to develop and explore the legend and origins of the Day of the Dead, as well as the peculiar and intrinsic relationship that Mexicans have with death. These two points (chapters I and II) are crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it serves as an introductory topic to the theme, since we need to understand how it all began during the pre-Hispanic period. Secondly, it helps us understand the background to this festivity, i.e. why Mexicans celebrate death and how they see it as another cycle of life. So, in this way, we can understand why Mexicans laugh at death, as well as why it is celebrated in a joyful and lively way, as it is truly a time of celebration and of gathering with friends, family, and the dead.

Another important aspect discussed was the Spanish influence on Mexican celebrations from the 16th century onwards. We can consider that the celebrations and the Mexican people probably experienced their first turning point, as Christian religious elements began to be inserted into a pagan reality. From this moment on, we see some transformations in the cult, bringing it closer to the European context.

In addition, the typical elements of the Day of the Dead were analysed, showing in detail their origin, evolution, importance, and current function. The evolution of the iconographic art of the Day of the Dead is crucial to understand and study because through it we can perceive the past, the present, and the future. For example, skulls, and skeletons have undergone a great evolution, as there are countless records of them, for example, in the Templo Mayor in Mexico City (Fig.2), in the Dance of Death, which was very popular in medieval Europe, and today, in a humoristic way, sugar skulls, decorative skeletons, and face paintings. In this way, it is possible to see the gradual evolution of the characteristic elements from pre-Hispanic times to the present day, demonstrating a true adaptation to Spanish influence and globalisation, respectively.

As a direct consequence of the evolution and globalisation of the celebrations, we can consider that there has been an evolution on an economic, cultural, and tourist level. In other words, the Day of the Dead is no longer seen purely from a mystical and religious point of view, but there are other issues affecting the celebrations, such as economic and tourist factors. As soon as it is publicised, tourists are invited to visit and experience the holiday, causing greater demand in the country currently. Several events have helped to contribute and make this festivity known to the world, namely: the inclusion of the Day of the Dead on UNESCO's Representative List of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, qualifying it as an integrative, representative, and community-based traditional expression; film tourism with the premiere of the films COCO and 007: Spectre. Film tourism has been the reason for the increase in tourist flows, due to the discovery of new motivations on the part of tourists. Media products, as was the case with these two films, have ended up being a means of transmitting information about a cult, with its celebratory characteristics and, ultimately, a tourist destination to be visited to discover what they have seen on television or in the cinema (as was the case with the International Day of the Dead Parade, which only began to be held due to high demand from tourists after they saw a reenactment in the film 007: Spectre).

In addition, therefore, demand at this time of year began to increase, leading to greater concern on the part of the government to satisfy the needs of tourists, from the mass manufacture and sale of typical objects to the entire dynamisation of tourist-cultural initiatives, instigating unbridled tourism.

However, all these developments can be interpreted positively and negatively. On the one hand, the positive aspect of commercialisation is reflected in the fact that incorporating the festival into commercial and tourist products allows new generations to get to know their culture, as well as ensuring that it never disappears, since celebrations aimed at tourists are constantly reused.

On the other hand, the negative aspect of commercialisation is the loss of authenticity, because the ancestral, syncretic, and traditional festivals that we are familiar with have been disappearing due to globalisation, commerce, the fusion of traits from other festivals, and mass tourism. Festivals and customs have been forcibly absorbed and pushed into state tourism strategies, creating an unsettling dichotomy as a cultural and tourist resource. Traditional local festivals are promoted as reenactments for visitors, in which the authenticity of a custom is transformed into a series of events to satisfy the needs of tourists.

The duality created by tourism based on the unrestricted economic exploitation of material and immaterial goods jeopardises historical memory, because these products are sold as tourist products and not as products with ancestral significance and representative of a people's history.

The concept of loss of authenticity has become a concern that certain academics and sociologists have defended in recent years since it has become a reality of this festival. Globalisation and marketing have a direct and powerful influence on the event, forcing it to change (for better or worse). However, there is an ambiguous reality here, because these transitions can be good because they accompany the growth of civilisation in space-time, but they can also be harmful because there is a greater distancing from ancestral origins.

It's interesting to see how something abstract has become so real. Through ritual/practice, business ideas emerge, which translate into profit. The Day of the Dead is much more than a religious heritage and has become the image of Mexico's identity, where tradition meets modernity.

The Day of the Dead is a real case study, as it is a complex, ambiguous festival that concentrates on the mystical, cultural, and economic, allowing us to analyse any question about it and even compare it with other celebrations such as Halloween and Cinco de Mayo. However, because it's such a dense topic and relates to a reality that is somewhat distant from my own, I had to rely on indirect sources without being able to have my research and first-hand experience.

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